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MINISTERING CHILDREN.

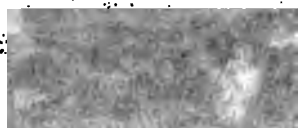
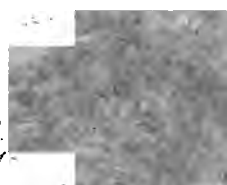
A SEQUEL.



W. J. Lister, Del.

W. J. Lister, Sculp.

" In the shop sat Benjamin Tovel, twisting willow withes,
 little Sue sorting them for her blind fathers hand, and
 Sharp on the floor at her feet " *Page 116*





MINISTERING CHILDREN

A SEQUEL.

BY

MARIA LOUISA CHARLESWORTH.



STEELEY, JACKSON & HALLIDAY, FLEET STREET,
LONDON. MDCCCCLXVII.



250. g. 287.

MINISTERION DE AGRICULTURA Y FOMENTO
A SECCION

MANA LOPEZ DE ALBA



SEELEY, JACKSON & HALLIDAY, FLEET STREET
LONDON MDCCCXLVII.



250. g. 287.

you a SEQUEL to the 'Ministering Children.' I shall be very glad if it should have an interest for you, and thankful, indeed, if it may aid you in the path of active love.

There is one sadness that I deeply feel: many who took a warm interest in the first have passed away, leaving earth poorer for their departed presence,—dear and honoured names, leaving us a bright example to lead us on as 'followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.'

Believe me,

Your faithful Friend,

M. L. CHARLESWORTH.

Sea Lawn, Oct. 1, 1866.

MINISTERING CHILDREN.

A SEQUEL.

CHAPTER I.

IT was autumn, and Farmer Smith had gathered in his harvest; round stacks of wheat, and barley-ricks, with scented hay, shut in the farm-yard with a substantial wall of promise for the winter. The cattle could fear no scarcity; and already in the barns the thrasher's flail beat out the golden grain. The plough was drawing its long furrows, turning up deep the fragrant soil; and children's hands already dropped the three wheat grains into the holes the dibblers made: its bed, until another year should gather it in, returned a hundred-fold. The leaves were turning gold and crimson; the robin sang his solitary lay; and the soft air, all warm with bright October sunshine, mellowed the orchard's store, and crumbled the moist earth beneath the ploughman's tread.

Farmer Smith was to be seen with eye intent upon his fields, as in the years gone by; his head was whitened now with snows of age, but his step still trod untired the

old familiar fields : the same men called him master, and the land around lay all in perfect order as of yore.

William still served his father with a son's devoted care, and held with general satisfaction the place of steward to the Hall farms around. He had grown into a graver man than might have been expected from a youth joyous and generous as his had been. His forehead was already furrowed by one line of care, and he passed for a reserved and silent man. Men said of him, 'He takes after his father;' but his mother had other notions of this cause of growing care, though as yet she said nothing.

Mrs. Smith stirred, as of old, with active step and ready hand within the house. Her form was still erect, but her face had softened into beauty; its hard lines and severe expression repelled no longer—a quiet tenderness was there; her voice still kept its own decisive tone, but its harshness was gone; her eye had kindness in its glance; and her smile, always sweet though rare, now made through all the year a sunshine in her home.

Rose had grown up beside her mother into a lovely village maiden, fair and fresh as the morning, the flower of all the farms around. Brought up by so wise a mother she had no false notions of life, but by happy labour lightened all her mother's care and Molly's toil, and made her presence everywhere a blessing. Many household arts had been learned by Rose when visiting in the home of her Derbyshire relatives: these were perfected by practice with her mother, who was skilful in any household work she took in hand. Rose had a closet stored with healing balms for internal use and outward application. There was a traffic of neighbours from cottage and farm, and even

tradesmen would respectfully beg for a little attention and aid. Cuts, bruises, or wounds that came of themselves, weak eyes, headaches, and chilblains, sprains, rheumatism, and coughs, all thought themselves the better for these healing balms. Had any one been so presumptuous as to prevail on Rose to change her home, a public appeal from all the disorders around would most likely have arisen to detain her by moral force ; but Rose and her mother were so bound together, that nothing but death could part one from the other. Rose, in her happy ignorance of actual diseases, was sometimes greatly puzzled by the descriptions that were given : as, for instance, a poor woman came up to beg for something that would cure her mother.

‘ What ails her ? ’ asked Rose.

‘ The ’splus they say it is, miss.’

‘ I don’t know the complaint,’ replied Rose, vainly pondering on what the disorder might be.

‘ Don’t you, miss ? They say it is a complaint that stands cousin-german to tampany’s fire.’

Rose was still more bewildered, but referred to the greater experience of her mother, who said, ‘ You can’t cure it, child ; I will see to the woman : she means erysipelas and St. Anthony’s fire.’ Or Rose was entreated to come, because the doctor had said he could not go after dinner to ‘ porpoises ;’ or asked to substitute her remedies for his, because, when ‘ something was wanted just to pose the old mother a little, he had made it so strong that it left her imposing all day.’ If Rose sometimes objected that she did not know what medicine to give, they would answer, ‘ It’s noways particular which, if so be you did make it — ’tis sure to be good.’ Affection’s honest flat-

tery, fully believed by the speaker, though heard by Rose with a doubtful smile, that still questioned, which? But Rose was not the village-doctress alone; her words breathed an influence beyond the necessities of earth, and many an ailing body grew better because she had led the troubled spirit to peace. You might see her of an afternoon, with the heavy farm produce on one arm, carrying up to the shop a store of butter or eggs, and on the other arm her own little basket, in which lay the secret balms that were to pour comfort on some suffering body or mind. And the village would have mourned a second bereavement had Rose passed away, as the Squire's sister, before.

In the month of September, when harvest was over, Rose went up to London on a long-promised visit to her uncle's house, on which Samson had silently reckoned since Christmas, though he still gave but small expression to feeling. Her absence left the farm-home unusually silent, but the absence was only for one month; in the third week of October, now close at hand, Rose would come home.

It was ironing-day, and the wash not having been what Mrs. Smith called a heavy one, she was ironing alone as the afternoon drew in, when William came in sight, slowly cantering up the green hill on his old favourite, Black Beauty. The faithful horse kept his spirit bravely on in old age, and William had broken in a young colt called Nora, who bade fair to equal Black Beauty in speed. She was young, as yet, for work, and only used now and then, but no one thought of riding or driving her except her own master, William; Black Beauty still finding it a pleasure to do all the work required. William stabled his horse and came in.

‘What, mother, alone at work? That does not look natural! How you must miss your shadow!’

‘You had better say my sunshine, I should think,’ said his mother; ‘and call me the shade, if you are after comparisons.’

William laid his hat on the little table by the door, and sat down by his mother; but he did not seem to have much to say: he leaned his head on his hand, and watched his mother’s brisk iron. Mrs. Smith ironed on in silence awhile; then said, in her decided tone,—

‘I wonder, for my part, that you don’t speak up for that little farm of Broadmeads. You won’t be likely to see such a chance again of settling yourself on the land; and lying alongside of ours as it does, why it would be almost like making one concern of the whole: and then, of course, if you had a mind to marry you could.’

‘Well, mother, it’s passed through my mind scores of times; and as for the land, I might, I dare say, stand a chance, for no one could behave more like a gentleman to me than the Captain has done when he has been over this way. But, I take it, he would not let me have it unless I lived in the house, and I couldn’t stand that alone.’

‘Why, then, can’t you marry like other folks, and settle yourself once for all, when you see a good chance, as you should do?’

‘I have thought of that too, mother; but I never cared only for one, and I don’t believe I could bring my mind to another.’

‘And why should you, lad? Can’t that one be had?’

‘I don’t know but she might, mother; only I have

seen a fear in the asking, lest you and father should be hurt, and think I had not looked so high as I might.'

'As for that,' replied Mrs. Smith, 'I can't speak to a thing till I know it. I am sure there are plenty no better than they should be, and though it is not for me to look down upon any, yet I do say, make a good choice or let it alone.'

'Well, mother, there's goodness; and not on my word alone.'

'Then, lad, that's enough. If we be to look down upon goodness because it is not pranked out with the conceits of this world,—I say, if we be to look down upon goodness, I don't know, for one, what we are to look up to! Certainly not to the God above, for He only is good; and 'tis He must be the Giver if any good thing be here.'

'Well, mother, 'tis Mercy Jones!'

'Take her, then, and God bless you! I am sure you may look further and not find a better.'

'Oh, mother, 'tis your goodness makes you say so.'

'No, my son, never speak of any goodness to me! If the good Lord has lightened my darkness, 'tis only to show me the vainglory of all that's not fashioned by Him; and when you have seen upon any the pure shine of His light, all the show of this world looks dark by its side.'

Now William knew that Mercy Jones had been from a child his mother's delight; there was something in her quiet, pleasant ways, that always did win his mother: but William feared what his father might think, and so made answer,—

‘ I am not sure what father would say ; nor how Rose would take to Mercy for me.’

‘ Nor I neither,’ replied Mrs. Smith. ‘ Let others speak for themselves, I never undertake to answer for them : but, for all that, I should say they are more apt than I to take up with goodness for its own sake alone. And Mercy’s a girl that the sun may look full on and not show up a dark spot in her young life, I’ll answer for. Has she not known from a child the Holy Scriptures, and framed all her mind upon them ? So, if others be any-ways against her, the sooner they are of my mind the better, is all I can say.’

‘ Oh, mother, I have half a mind just to step up and put it to her before I tell father or Rose.’

‘ What, have no words been between you ?’

‘ No, mother ; and yet I have often felt a fear she must know—have almost hoped she did know ; and then I thought again, if it never could be, what a trouble, perhaps, I had been making for her !’

‘ Don’t go on my word, lad ; ’tis your father’s that holds both for you and for me, let the thing be what it may : but if he says nothing against it, you may tell her for me she will be as welcome to my heart as the light to my eyes.’

William took his hat and walked out to breathe freely ; before him rose, as often before, the sweet vision of Mercy, as she bore on the day of Jem’s wedding the open basket of fragrant white lilies on her arm, in her bridesmaid attire, side by side with his sister, and even then not less lovely to him. A little taller than Rose, more silent and shy, yet simple still as a child ; so skilful too in her ways,

able even to please his mother ; and why had he never seen her in those brighter garments again ? Why did she wear always some grave, quiet colour, that none who only liked bright things would care to look upon twice ? Was this her lady's wish ? Not likely, he thought, for the other maids could dress in smart clothing when they pleased ; he almost believed that it was for his sake, because she would be passed unnoticed of all beside him. Countless times had William thought all this to himself, but it had only made him careful and troubled ; for he had never grieved his parents, never gone from their word, and in the station he filled they might wish him, he feared, to look higher. But William might have known that we have a Father in heaven, who will order events for the true welfare of those who have lived, as he had done, to honour their father and mother. He stood now on the door-step, and looked over pasture and field ; the long level beams of the setting sun lay bright on the land, and the foliage of autumn glowed warm in their rays. The clouds rose in the west, heaped up in splendour of purple and gold ; all the farm sounds came softened, as they do at the fall of the autumn day, when a deeper tenderness steals over nature, like the gentleness shed on old age, bringing the spirit nearer heaven while the body is sinking to earth. William listened to the sounds of the fold, all blended in music to him, for his heart gave the keynote of joy. Then looking up he saw the figure of his father on the brow of a hill, standing out in the sunlight, and he hastened to meet him.

Mrs. Smith had gone on with her ironing until it was done—it was rare indeed for any feeling to stop her short in her work ; but when the last apron was ironed and hung

on the linen horse to air at the back-kitchen fire, Mrs. Smith did not hasten, as usual, to get the tea ready, but sat down with her irons on their rests, and the ironing-board not put away. The house was silent and lonely. Molly was out milking the large dairy of cows, so Mrs. Smith sat down, almost without knowing that she did so, and looked out through the window, not seeing at that moment anything that was there. Many thoughts filled her mind; she thought of the past, the birth of William her first-born, the pride with which she had reared him, wishing great things for him, how often she had tried to put her own conceit into him, to make him think himself something good; but, somehow, the boy never would hold himself high, but was always after doing a kind act for others, taking no account of who or what they might be, if he saw them in trouble or want. Mrs. Smith used to say, in those days of her pride, 'The boy has his father's nature, not mine!' It vexed her then when she said it, but now she thanked God who had kept her child from the evil her pride had brought round him. Then she thought on his starting for London, when her hopes rose high that he would one day be a rich man and live in grandeur up there; she had heard of such things as fortunes made there by country lads who entered London houses of business, and no lad she was sure could have more pleasant ways than her William. Yet, with this secret hope, she had made sore work of his going, and vexed all around her because she missed him from the place; all this she remembered with sorrow of heart. And now her first-born son was a farmer for life, and looking no higher than a cottage girl for his bride. But this did not now grieve his

mother, her eyes had been opened to see things unseen by the dim eyes of sense. Yet she sat on in silent thought, and a quiet look of sadness was over her face, for when we remember the past there is much to make us humble, perhaps mournful, in spirit ; it is when we look upward to the Love leading us on, the love that forgiveth our sins, and crowneth us with loving-kindness and tender mercies, it is then we are glad and hope brightens within.

While Mrs. Smith was sitting on in quiet thought, her irons not yet put away, no tea on the table, though the kettle, as it hung from its hook in the chimney, puffed out steam by her side, vainly reminding, and the clock struck the late hour of six ; all at once Molly was heard in the back-kitchen, her milking over, and Mr. Smith came in at the door.

‘What! no tea ready yet?’ and he looked at the clock.

Mrs. Smith started and rose, saying, ‘Well there, now, how I have let the time slip!’

‘I guess how it is!’ said Mr. Smith, in a kind tone, somewhat sad. ‘I guess how it is!’ Mrs. Smith stopped short and stood by his side, and he went on to say, ‘Our boy has been telling his love-tale to me. I never so much as suspected, I am sure ; and it’s come on me rather heavy, for all the respect that I have for the girl. I should like him to have married to a few pounds to start with. No doubt she has laid by, with good wages, never wasted on folly or finery ; still her savings can be but of small account. I am sure he has often stepped in when he ought to have held back, and eased the burden for us, that I am afraid may lie heavy on him. And yet perhaps not so, if we go by the Scriptures, for they do make mention of a

temporal blessing for children that honour their parents, as I am sure he has done. Still, I should have been glad if he had married to a few hundreds, just to help to start him off clear, if he gets the lease of Broadmeads, as I am pretty sure he will ; not but what I am sure the girl is worthy his choice, so modest and taking, to my mind, in her pleasant, simple ways. So I told him I would not stand against it ; and I fancy with that he is gone off to the Hall ; for he told me your mind upon it.'

'Well, to my thinking it must be for the best; we needs must consider that there is One wiser than we who orders his way, when you do but remember how Will's been the making of all. There's Joe and Samson and Ted—' the mother would have said more, but as she named her sons and stopped short at little Tim, her heart failed her, as it did for the most part when remembering him, and she turned away to set the tea. Mr. Smith would have been glad of a few more assuring words from his wife, but she could not give them then. He did not know the deeper current of feeling, and thought her only haste was for tea, and said, 'There's no such hurry for tea, William is not in yet !' But Mrs. Smith turned not again.

Molly came in, put away the ironing, and the table was set, its large flap up, for Mrs. Smith never yet measured numbers. There was sure to be a place for the unexpected guest, plates and knives always came in greater number than wanted, and the plain food was plentiful. Sometimes Mr. Smith would say, 'Who is coming to-day ?'

'No one, that I know of,' Mrs. Smith would reply, not aware that her bountiful hand had called forth the question in earnest or play ; but the consequence was, that whoever

came in it seemed they were expected, or their coming prepared for, and the guest felt at home.

Mrs. Smith was now on foot, and when that was the case work never hung long. The tea-things clattered cheerfully under her active hand, that ringing sound of coming tea, which brings alike to cottage and farm the sweet feeling of refreshment and home. This evening it might seem Mrs. Smith's thoughts were still wandering, for she spread her table as if for a festal occasion; she brought out not only the usual dishes of cheese, ham, bread and butter, and hot toast, but her home-made cakes, and preserved fruits of the garden, and by William's seat she placed the one piece of family plate, a silver mug left by her father as a legacy to him. Mr. Smith at length gave a look from his arm-chair by the fire, and smiling, said, 'What! is Rose expected to-night?'

'Not yet awhile, I doubt,' replied Mrs. Smith; 'but maybe we shall see another we may be none the less thankful to own as a daughter.'

Mr. Smith looked again into the fire, and sat silently pondering on all. It was the habit of the farm never to sit down to table until all were come in. Many looks were often lost from window and door, and much time sometimes spent in merely waiting; and this might seem a loss, but it was not in reality, for in active life such as theirs it gave a brief rest; and a strong tie was formed by the certainty that if one were hindered in return, all would be waiting and watching with the expecting care that imparts beyond all daily incidents the sweet feeling of home. So the tea in the tea-pot sat brewing by the fire, and Mrs. Smith took her quiet seat in her arm-chair beside it.

And now it might have been expected, that while awaiting his return they would speak again on the subject of their son William's prospects. But Mr. Smith had fallen into his usual silence, the power to speak freely seemed to have passed for that time, and Mrs. Smith did not feel it easy to begin the question again. She was conscious of a deeper joy in this marriage hope than her husband could feel. When the strong pride that once reigned in her heart had yielded and fled at the voice of the meek and lowly Redeemer, all her worldly self had died with it. Old things, with her, had indeed passed away, and all things become new. Her thoughts were now set on that 'gold tried in the fire,' which her Redeemer bade her buy; and the white raiment He alone could provide. All who possessed these appeared already rich in her eyes, for she saw in the Light of the Lord. Mercy, she was sure, possessed this heavenly treasure, and all the gain of this world appeared poor by its side. Mercy also had been trained as a child in all the work a farm-house must require, and this, in Mrs. Smith's wise estimation, was in itself more real wealth than hundreds of gold and silver could be in such a situation without it. With Mr. Smith it was not quite the same; he had always been a man with a mind humble and true, and when led to look higher than this world, even for the hope laid up in heaven, he still held on to his honest thoughts of what would best help a man here. He would not now say a word against the wish of his son, indeed he was sure there was not a word that could be said against it. Still he agreed in it because it was his son's wish, not because he felt, like Mrs. Smith, that William had done the best thing he could. But now, when her husband's

mind came not quite up to hers, Mrs. Smith did not argue upon it, as she once would have done; she waited in silence, and often in prayer, that he might see the blessing for this world, as well as for that which is to come; and as it had always been her way to be silent when approving, her husband was satisfied that silence gave consent.

‘Where can the lad be?’ said Mr. Smith, turning his eye on the clock; but even as he spoke the mother rose up, her quick ear caught the sound of happy feet hastening in, and as she reached the always open door of the farm-kitchen, the father looked round and saw Mercy clasped in her arms in a mother’s embrace. Rising up with a kindling glow at that sight, Farmer Smith held out his hand to his son, then to Mercy, who turned to hear the voice of a father say, ‘God bless you, my children.’ And they sat down to the table, a gathered family at once; and the weight of years rolled away from William’s brow in that glad evening hour, and the sweetness of the desire accomplished brought back the sunny smile and the buoyant step of his youth.

CHAPTER II.

It was decided that William should ask Mr. Clifford to stand his friend and make the request for him for the lease of Broadmeads, as Captain Disney, to whom the farm belonged, was a friend of Mr. Clifford's. The tie formed in youth between Herbert and William had never been broken. Herbert Clifford had grown up to find the truth of the proverb, 'Old love never rusts.' He leaned on his farm steward as on the friend of a lifetime; and William, who had been faithful in little, was now found faithful also in much. He who in his early youth had kept the hearth warm and bright of the widow and the fatherless, and won from his father the old tarpauling to roof in dry the cottage where old Willy dwelt, could not prove oppressive when power was placed in his hands. He was firm to his master's interest, but he was true to the tenants. Driving smoke and cruel draughts were realities to William, and he did not consider the rent of the labourer or the widow honestly taken unless he did his best to get these home miseries away. When trouble befell or times went heavy with the farm-tenants, they might be as certain of William's consideration and care to plead for them as if they could have told their own tale. Yet sometimes, when they made out that this or that went against them, William would show them how other things

were in their favour; he thoroughly knew the work he had undertaken, and could judge between an ordinary or extraordinary pressure.

Mr. Clifford welcomed William's announcement of his engagement to Mercy Jones and his wish for a settlement at Broadmeads with a hearty congratulation, and promised to make the application without any delay.

Mercy Jones had long been Mrs. Clifford's only attendant, and the one sorrow that shadowed Mercy's happiness now was the prospect of leaving her mistress, whom she had served and loved with all the warm devotion of her life. Mercy had had no common training. Left a little orphan, cherished by her dear old grandmother's fostering care, and her true-hearted shepherd-uncle Jem, her childhood was shielded from all blighting evil. Her infant mind had first opened under Miss Clifford's influence, hallowing it by heavenly ties before it met the rough contact of earth. The loss of that angelic lady had deepened and strengthened all little Mercy's best feelings and desires. Then came her early training at the Hall, where the old housekeeper, the large-hearted Mackenzie, had long ruled in faithful service. Then the special kindness shown to Mercy by Mrs. Clifford, who knew the love her own departed child had for the orphan. Mrs. Clifford employed Mercy to read to her, by which means her mind, open to all higher influences, was educated beyond her station; she was also used in many missions of charity, and her mistress trusted to her in all things. This unusual training had made her more fit as a companion for William than any other, far or near, could probably have been.

Mrs. Clifford rejoiced in the engagement, though a pang passed through her heart, for no other maid could ever bring that strongest earthly tie of an association with her departed child. No ready-made servant could ever be to her like Mercy Jones, who had grown up under her eye, and learned all things under her care. Still Mrs. Clifford rejoiced, though a feeling of faintness passed over her spirit as she thought of turning to a stranger for all the services her advancing years required. 'But,' she said, 'they have both waited long. It is better now than later. I would far rather have all as it is, and see those true hearts united. When I have overcome the separation and strangeness I shall only rejoice in it too.'

Sunday came, and William walked towards the Hall to meet Mercy. She had started early, that they might walk alone by the lanes skirting the park, instead of amidst the gathering people up the hill-side. They trod the autumnal lanes side by side, with that hush of the fading year and the sabbath stillness around, and the mellow sunshine fell upon them through the arching foliage above, the deep blue of the sky never looking more lovely than when seen through the pale gold of the overarching leaves. Mercy had put on her brighter array. William saw her again in the very same dress he remembered long years ago, when she stood as bridesmaid to Patience—the dress that he then thought suited her so well. It had been laid up since that time, and when he looked down upon its soft colour as she walked by his side, he said, 'I remember this dress: why has it been laid by so long?' And Mercy did not answer, but only returned the pressure of

his hand enclosing hers, and felt what it was to be safe under the shield of a noble manhood's tenderness and power.

But the sabbath passed away with its hallowing grace from above, and the week-days came on, and the time for Rose to return. This child of the farm was like both the first and the last rose of summer, all welcomed her coming and felt sad when she left. There are some whose presence always breathes a freshness, they shed sunshine where they dwell, and wherever they pass a gladness springs up for others. This is because their hearts are a wellspring of thoughtful love, and the little streams always flowing make their way all around wherever they are wanted the most. There are others in this world who hoard up their love, to pour it all out in this or that special direction, according to their own self-pleasing choice, and the consequence is that it flows with a torrent force for a time, and then ebbs away, often leaving a barren waste of feeling. Not like the fertilizing streams of true unselfish love, which have the same source and the same end as that 'river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High.'

William was up with the dawn, rubbing bright the brass harness, for he had a day's work to do before going to meet Rose at the town where the stage-coach would bring her. How sweet the stir of home when the absent are coming! The old chariot of time that has travelled slowly, steadily rolling day by day, finds its wheels suddenly oiled by a feather from affection's soft wing, and flies speedily on. How many looks at the clock as the hours are hastening! How short the time seems for the

little things to be done! And then all must be finished, the busy stir over, and the evening gown on, and father within, and the tea-table ready, and all waiting and watching for the loved one's return. May not this picture of home as we find it on earth bear some sweet resemblance to that better home above, where a Father is watching, and an elder Brother making ready, and love more than a mother's will welcome, and joy be in the presence of the angels of God as each child of the kingdom enters in?

Now Mrs. Smith was getting uneasy on the question of time, as she always did an hour at least before any reasonable ground could arise. 'What in the world can William be after?' said Mrs. Smith, looking anxiously out; 'he might be half way to the town by this time.' The cowboy, Adonizedec by name, was giving the last sweeping to the stone-yard at the back-door, but he stopped and looked to the stable in sympathetic anxiety. 'Now, Dony, you run and tell your master William I am afraid he'll be late.' But William appeared in sight, leading Nora in her bright harness of new burnished leather and brass.

'Just you get me the whip, mother.'

'Now, Will, you'll be late! What's the use of such smartness if the time be let go?'

'Don't you worry, mother; I am all right as to time. I have never been yet without near an hour to wait.'

William was soon in the gig, the whip in its rest, and the great umbrella in front, though never sky gave a surer promise of a fair autumn evening. Mrs. Smith and Molly breathed freely when the gig was once on the road; and Sukey, trained under Molly in milking the cows, and

already intended as a servant-girl for Mercy at Broadmeads, ran off with her milk-pails in light-hearted glee.

It will soon be a tale of the days that are gone, all this calm leisure of life, that can count on being an hour beforehand with time; this repose in the still depths of nature, the rural haunts of sweet woodlands and farms. The shriek of the railway has changed the reckoning of life, the worth of a minute is told by the dial-plate at the stations all over the land; and daily events which in the still life of the past stirred the heart to its depths, may become, by the rapid succession of all things, only ripples that move but the surface. Let us then retain, if only in pictures amongst us, the memory of the life that has been.

There was the same patient waiting at the country-town inn as always before. Nora, the young horse, was stabled, and William, less ready for town-talk than usual, walked along the highroad on which the coach would be coming. He took his seat on a stile watching the distance, and his thoughts travelled between Mercy and Rose. He loved his sister with all the heart of a brother, and she had never had a secret from him, and now that suddenly his long doubtful hope had been changed into this peaceful certainty, he felt as if he had wronged her that she had not known it. And how would Rose take to it when she did know it all? What would his quick eye read in the clear mirror of her fair open face? Mercy was to Rose as a friend, but would she welcome her as a sister? Whatever the first feeling might be, William knew love for him would soon reconcile; but that first feeling! it could not be hid. He knew all the changes of that face from a child, and had always cared to brighten each

troubled look into joy; and he felt—he silently felt—that first expressive look he must now read would leave its impress on his heart for ever. But the coach was in sight. Rose looked out as they passed. William laid a firm hand on it, and climbed up behind, and was there when it stopped to take Rose from within. Her one box secured and packed under the gig seat, Rose waited in the inn while William saw Nora harnessed; she then took her place by William, and Nora wheeled them swiftly away.

‘Oh, William, I know it! I have heard it already!’

‘Heard what?’ asked her brother.

‘Why, heard of Mercy and you! Oh, I am so glad, and I always knew it would be!’

So the last doubt rolled away from that fair bridal sky, and the orphan Mercy was pledged to William amidst the love of his house. So it is, when God giveth He giveth abundantly; but then we must follow His will and wait for His time. ‘Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.’

As they drove home Rose looked out on all sides with a quiet delight; each hedge-row and field had its greeting for her. The day's labour was over, the husbands and fathers were home, the cottage hearths glowing bright, and the little supper-tables spread; but who was there that did not look out with a smile or a satisfied glance when they saw Rose passing by? ‘She is home again, is she?’ said the old people. ‘She is coming!’ said the children, and the village settled down that evening in content.

We need not tell the joy when the farm gig reached home, and there was mother, and father, and Molly, and

Sukey, and Dony the farm-boy, all looking as full of happy leisure for Rose as if no bustle from dawn had disturbed their repose. And when safe in her own little chamber she exclaimed, 'Oh, mother, you will have another daughter, and a sister for me!' And Mrs. Smith replied,—

'Then Will's told you already?'

'No, not William; they had heard at the Inn, and were full of it there. They said they were sure all must wish him well.'

'Ah, child, man's good will is pleasant to tread on, but our feet must be shod for rough climbing as well.'

Sweet it was to Mrs. Smith when the evening had closed, to draw the white curtains round Rose in her own little bed, and hear her child say, 'Oh, mother, there is nothing like home—no rough places here!'

At the Hall it was soon known that Mercy was promised to another home, a home of her own. Her pleasant ways, respectful manners, and faithful heart, had won for her the general kindness of all. Most of the old servants had almost a parental feeling for her, with only one exception, and that one was Nurse Brame. Some two years before this time the Lady Gertrude's devoted maid, the one who had been her mother's attendant and friend, left for a short time for medical aid in London, and Nurse Brame had begged to come and fill her place for the time. The Lady Gertrude at first feared to consent, and objected on the ground of the fatigue being too much for her years, but the old nurse would take no denial. So she had her own way, and came into service again for a time. What could be so sweet to her as such service, she thought?

There was no failure in bodily power; the high air of the hills, the plentiful table, and the daily exercise, soon renewed the active vigour of the energetic Nurse Brame, or Mrs. Brame, as she was now called, having for some time given up her attendance as a nurse to the sick—a giving up that the Lady Gertrude had regretted, as a lost employment of great usefulness and interest.

The faithful maid, who had left for a time, was never able to return; all that affection could do for her was to provide every means for soothing and cheering her life's slow decline. This was done to the utmost, and Mrs. Brame filled the vacant place; filled it quite to her own satisfaction, as she sometimes said, 'Who should know the right thing and the right way to do it if not I, who have nursed my lady from a babe?' The Lady Gertrude had been used in her childhood to submit herself to her nurse, and now did so again with that quiet composure which always made the best of any personal discomfort, especially when the feelings of another were involved. But household troubles soon began. Mrs. Brame expected to reign supreme in her Lady's confidence, regard, and attention. A universal jealousy sprang up in her mind; and, as Mrs. Brame always thought herself in the right, she attributed the sad effects of her own wrong feeling to others. No one was so much the object of this jealous feeling as Mercy. All seemed to have a special kindness for Mercy, and none were afraid of showing it, because Mercy never forgot her own place, never took any wrong advantage of the good will she won. She had been in the habit of doing many little services for the Lady Gertrude, to relieve the failing strength of the faithful maid now departed. These Mrs.

Brame now called 'Mercy's upstart interference.' She resented any aid from Mercy the more because the Lady Gertrude always seemed to Mrs. Brame to have a special kindness for Mercy; partly no doubt arising from Mercy's devoted service to Mrs. Clifford, partly for the orphan's own sake: for had not the Lady Gertrude been early left an orphan, and did she not know the heart's earthly desolation? But Mrs. Brame had no such perceptions, and the power to impart them belongs not to man.

Three fair children now gladdened the ancestral Hall: Constance, who was seven, Alfred not yet quite six, and little Maud the baby pet of two years. Their infant charms graced that English home with sweetest promise for the years to come. The old grey stones, whose walls had sheltered generations few had numbered, the old trees, whose boughs had made the music of the woods around for centuries untold, and the old love within and around the place, all looked down, or seemed to look down, in tenderness and hope upon them all, except Mrs. Brame. She was quite ready to make much of the children, as she often said; but then she expected them to make much of her, and this the children did not understand. 'I nursed their mother,' she would say; 'who should they think of more than me?' The chief displeasure was their love for Mercy. Each little child had often been cradled in Mercy's arms, and had looked up into her quiet eyes, in whose dark depths there lay the sweet expression that wins a child. Their upper nurse was one of those women whose heart of love had room for all; for Mercy she had cared as for a daughter, and the nursery was Mercy's play. All broken toys, all secret plans, all hopes and expecta-

tions, were imparted to Mercy: this Mrs. Brame found hard to bear. But now, at length, the outburst came, as it always does, sooner or later, when the atmosphere is overcharged with dangerous elements.

Mr. Clifford had received a favourable reply from Captain Disney, which he had communicated to William; and a few days afterwards, when riding out with little Alfred at his side, mounted on his tiny pony Snowberry, Mr. Clifford had showed Alfred Mercy's new home, telling him it was a secret, but he might tell Mercy he had seen it. Alfred came home full of the importance of this great secret, and, hurrying in, he shouted Mercy's name, as he climbed slowly up the long flight of stairs. Not getting a reply he went to Mrs. Clifford's room, always open to her darling grandson, and, standing within the door, he asked, 'Where is Mercy, grandmamma?'

Mrs. Clifford looked round from her writing-table to the door where little Alfred stood. 'I don't know where Mercy is; come and tell me what you want.'

'It is a secret, grandmamma. Can you keep a secret?'

'Yes, as well as you can, I think,' replied Mrs. Clifford.

At this Alfred looked round to be sure of the door, then, standing on tiptoe, he whispered into the listening ear stooping down to him, that he had seen Mercy's new house, and he was going to tell her all about it.

'Shall I ring for Mercy?' asked grandmamma.

'Oh, no,' replied Alfred; 'I must tell Mercy all alone, for it is a secret, and no one must be near.' So little Alfred went on his way still shouting, 'I want Mercy!' In a few moments Mercy and Mrs. Brame both appeared in sight. At sight of Mercy Alfred exclaimed, 'Oh,

Mercy, I want you ! you must come with me quite alone, I have a secret to tell you !' and, taking hold of Mercy's apron, he drew her into his mother's room, and shut the door more decidedly than was civil to Mrs. Brame, who was left standing outside. This disrespect to Mrs. Brame was the worst occasion of offence that had yet arisen ; for the children, both by nature and training, were not wanting in the sweet courtesies of life ; but the weight of this secret had overbalanced little Alfred's good breeding. Mercy had seen the cloud gather on Mrs. Brame's face, and vainly tried to persuade Alfred to put off the secret.

' You must listen now, Mercy ; there is no one can hear. Papa said I might tell you, only it is a secret ! I have seen your new house, and it is such a pretty one, all green leaves growing over the stones, and the sun shone like gold on the windows, only I don't know what is inside.'

Unhappily for little Alfred it was the time for tea in the nursery, and Sally Millington, a brisk young woman, who served as under-nursemaid, was looking for him. Meeting Mrs. Brame she asked, ' Had she seen him ?' and when Mrs. Brame found that tea was waiting for Alfred she said, ' I will find him, I know where he is ;' glad of the occasion for breaking in on the secret, and exercising her authority. Reopening the loudly-shut door, she found Alfred still intent on the secret ; taking him hastily by the arm Mrs. Brame said, ' You must come with me, sir ; you are wanted at tea !'

' Not just for a minute, Brame ; I know Cox will wait for me. I want to tell Mercy a secret.'

' Nonsense,' said Mrs Brame ; ' you must come directly, and not keep every one waiting for you.'

‘ Did Cox send you ? ’ asked Alfred.

‘ I am no nursery-maid,’ replied Mrs. Brame ; ‘ you are to come because I tell you.’

‘ Go now, Master Alfred,’ said Mercy, entreatingly ; ‘ do as Mrs. Brame tells you, and I will come after tea.’

‘ I will not go unless Cox sends for me,’ said Alfred ; ‘ not until I have told Mercy all the secret.’

‘ We shall see about that,’ said Mrs. Brame, taking Alfred in her strong arms to carry him off.

This was treatment quite new to the boy, and raising his little hand, he struck Mrs. Brame.

Mrs. Brame, still more indignant, secured her little prisoner’s hands, and carried him off in wrath to the nursery. Betty Cox, hearing a very unusual commotion, opened the door, when, to her surprise, she saw the heir to the House of Clifford struggling in Mrs. Brame’s arms, his hands held in her hand. Such a scene had never been witnessed before, and Betty Cox stood mute with surprise.

‘ There ! ’ said the indignant Mrs. Brame, ‘ I have brought your young gentleman ; you may well look ashamed of him. I am, I am sure, and I shall let his behaviour be known to his parents.’

Poor Alfred, when set free, rushed to his nurse’s side, then, turning round to face his enemy, exclaimed, ‘ Go away, naughty Brame ! go away ! ’ and, before Betty Cox could stop him, he gave another hearty slam to the door.

‘ What is all this about ? Have you forgotten yourself ? Come here and tell me,’ said Betty Cox, in her own quiet way, sitting down on her low nursery chair. But Alfred was too much disquieted to tell his own tale ;

and as one rule of Betty's gentle discipline was 'never to vex a child when the trouble was on him,' she only said, 'Now your sisters want their tea, I must attend upon them;' and she smoothed his ruffled curls with her hand, wiped his tears, and did all she could to calm his distress. But Alfred could not eat; he soon climbed to his old place on his nurse's knee, and ended his trouble for that day by falling asleep on the white folds of her neckerchief, pillowing his little head on her bosom.

CHAPTER III.

MERCY did not venture to the nursery until she knew the little ones would be in their cots. She found Mrs. Cox watching by Alfred, with an anxious look on her quiet face. It was a relief to Mercy to tell out all her trouble. She had long felt Mrs. Brame's jealous temper and hasty manners, but she had not spoken of it to any one before : now she feared some further trouble for the boy would arise out of this evening's displeasure. Mercy was crying over the tale when the Lady Gertrude came in to look at her sleeping children, and, seeing there was trouble, inquired the cause. Mercy told all that had befallen, and Mrs. Cox concluded the account with the scene at her nursery-door. Lady Gertrude sat silently listening, and looking on the flushed cheek of her sleeping boy. At last she said,—‘ I am glad to have heard of this trouble first from you. I have long seen that all was not right with Brame, but I did not expect such a struggle as this. I am very sorry on every account ; but sometimes a storm clears the sky, and we must hope it will be so in this case.’

Mrs. Brame found amongst the household that evening a distant behaviour and short answers. Sally Millington had given her own account of the contest, and, not knowing how it began, had supplied by her own imagination the cause. There was much displeasure downstairs, the men

saying that 'Master Alfred had always behaved like a gentleman, and been treated like one until then, and there was no putting up with the bad tempers of women.' All this did not soften Mrs. Brame's spirit; and the Lady Gertrude, who would gladly have been left alone for that evening, found Brame already in waiting, with a face of discontent and displeasure. Brame was silent at first, not having quite made up her own mind as to what course to take. She felt uncomfortable with every one: no one treated her as she felt she ought to be treated; no respect, no affection, and yet who had so much right to expect it as she had—the oldest servant of all in the house! It could not be ignorance on the part of others, for she had told them all, times without number, the reasons for showing her respect: she had set up her claims, and exercised her authority, but it was all of no use; the whole set were alike—not one better than another: there was no respect for age, no regard for long service!

These were Mrs. Brame's thoughts of the household. She did not turn her mind's eye back to see who it was that whispered these thoughts in her heart; if she had done so, she would have seen they were all whispered by one on whose hard forehead was written, in plain letters, PRIDE. But Mrs. Brame thought not of this. Then she began to blame the children as ungrateful, and her master, and even her own Lady Gertrude, for not seeing that a proper attention was paid to her. She felt greatly hurt and displeased, and thought she would tell them all, once more, plainly her mind. Then, again, poor Brame feared that this would not be much use; she had often tried it before, and with no good results. Then PRIDE suggested

to her, had she not better express her utmost displeasure by saying she would go, and not put up any longer with their unbecoming ways? But perhaps this might please them; they might wish to get rid of her! No, the power was hers to go or to stay, and she would use her power, and she would not leave them in peace until they behaved better to her. The difficulty of deciding what to say had kept Mrs. Brame silent. Lady Gertrude soon spoke, saying gravely, but gently, 'I am very sorry, Brame, to hear of your trouble with Alfred; how was it that you got into a contest with him?' Then Brame looked up in double displeasure to find that her lady had already heard the tale; she gave her own history of Alfred's behaviour, and added to it her own sense of the wrong done to herself by the disrespect and want of feeling shown by all in the house. The outpouring was long, but Lady Gertrude let the pent-up stream have its way, and when Brame had exhausted both herself and her words she said calmly, 'It is too late to talk this over now, Brame; and you are hardly fit for it to-night, I fear. To-morrow evening I shall be alone, and we can talk quietly over the past and the future. Let us both think over it until then, and ask to be shown a happier way than that of separation to end all these dissensions.'

Upon these quiet words Mrs. Brame retired; but the thought of that one word, 'separation,' laid hold on her heart. Ivy Lane in its dimness rose up to her view; her solitary room and the lonely life there looked dreary, without all the sweet faces and pleasant ways of the Hall. For Brame had a true heart, capable of strong affection; but pride and self-will had darkened the light within her,

and she saw things in the false colours cast by pride, not in the light of humility and truth.

A cold desolate feeling chilled the heart of Mrs. Brame. She thought it was caused by others ; but it was the effect of her own self-will and pride. Every one who indulges pride and self-will will find, sooner or later, a cold, cheerless void left within ; and if the tender mercy of God does not meet them with its softening love, the stone within will not melt, nor the chilled heart warm again.

Lady Gertrude had dismissed Mrs. Brame from her presence, but she could not dismiss the painful subject from her mind. She had trained her little son in self-control ; he had tried his best and gained the victory in many a hard struggle : but now she was not by, he had lost himself, and perhaps would lose heart in fresh efforts for the future ! Not so, Lady Gertrude ! when we learn by our falls to take faster hold of the Hand that leads us, and not to set one step without that fostering care. Yet the occasion was sad, and the trouble not new ; and she, who seldom wept now, was giving it her tears, when a voice behind her said, ‘ Gerty, my own darling, in tears !’ and smiling through them, as knowing he would chide her for failing spirits in the strife, she looked up to the face of her husband — that fine expressive face, where courage, gentleness, and tenderness, had all made a home. ‘ What is it ?’ he asked, as he knelt by her side. Lady Gertrude told the story of Alfred and Mrs. Brame, and then her fear that she had made a mistake in yielding to the entreaties of her old nurse to allow her to come as an inmate of the house. She had heard it said, ‘ Old servants were

seldom peacemakers in a house,' and she began to fear it was true; for Brame was far more ready to complain of the faults of others, than to try her best to improve them.

Herbert listened to all, and his own boyhood's trouble rose up in remembrance, as it had done countless times in his life, with a breathing of assurance and blessing. And he said, 'A disappointment does not prove we have made a mistake—does it? It may be only to try our perseverance in the way, and the very disappointment and trial may be the right means to success in the end. When I have an object in view, and get hold of some disappointment or trouble in the way, I am ready to think then I must be all right for the end. "Through the waves to the shore" is true of countless blessings in life, and will be of this. Don't let us give up the old nurse of your childhood: she will come all right at last, if we wait in patience and trust. We must ask the wisdom that we lack, and our Divine Counsellor will not only give it, but do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think.'

These assuring words were enough, and Peace spread its wings over the slumbers of night.

Little Alfred awoke with a still heavy heart, and told all his trouble to his dear old nurse. Betty Cox's strict sense of justice made it rather hard to her, in this case, to express all the censure she yet felt as if she ought to give; so she wound up her short reproof by saying, 'Brave men never fight women.'

Little Alfred was scarcely dressed when he heard his father's step coming towards the nursery. Alfred had never been afraid of that step before, but now he ran to the inner nursery, where Mrs. Cox was dressing his little

sisters for breakfast; but his papa's voice called 'Alfred,' and Alfred went to him.

'What is this I hear of you, Alfred? Tell me, did you strike a woman; and an aged woman, too?'

'I did give Brame one thump, papa.'

'Then I am ashamed of my son! You will never win your spurs, nor be one of those true Christian knights you are so fond of hearing about, if you strike at women. You should live to take care of them, and comfort them in trouble, and never make them angry, but learn to govern yourself.'

'I am quite sorry, papa: is Brame very sore?'

'Poor Brame's heart is very sore, because you did not do what she told you, and struck her. You must ask her pardon before you come downstairs, and tell her you are sorry, and will mind her word the next time. I will write you a little lesson here with my pencil, and Cox will teach it to you. You must repeat it to me every morning when you come down at breakfast, that you may never forget it.' Alfred's father took a card from his pocket and wrote, not with pencil, but with ink that stood by:—

'He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty;
And he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city.'

'He who reigns within himself, and rules
Passions, desires, and fears, is more a king;
Which every wise and virtuous man attains.'

Betty Cox taught little Alfred his lesson day after day; and when both he and she knew it perfectly she laid up the little card, saying, 'I will give him that again, when maybe his need will be greater than now.'

When the children had had their early nursery break-

fast they always went to their mother's room, but this morning poor Alfred's courage was gone. He knew he had given way to passion, forgotten his mother's oft-repeated lessons, and he could not bear to see her look sad for fault of his. 'Will you take me?' he said, reaching up his little hand to his nurse: so Mrs. Cox went with them to their mother's door. Alfred looked up into the sweet sadness in his mother's face, and when she stooped to kiss him he clasped his little arms around her neck, and sobbing said, 'Mamma, Alf's so sorry!' The mother put her arm around her boy, while Constance and little Maud, in a sad surprise, said their morning's prayer; then Mrs. Cox herself, that morning, carried little Maud, while Constance stepped by her side, down to their papa. And the mother and her child were left alone.

'Alfy,' she said gently, 'God sees our tears when we are sorry for our sins, and He forgives, and comforts us when no one else can. I was sure you would be sorry when you thought what you had done. The Bible says, "Even a child is known by his ways;" and if your way be one of self-will and passion, it must be far off from the way of the holy child Jesus, who was meek and lowly in heart. Will you kneel down and pray to Him now?'

Little Alfred knelt down, but he could pray no prayer that morning except tears. Well that mother knew the language of tears: they had often been her heart's deepest prayer in childhood and youth; she was content they should now be her child's. Silently she prayed for him; and when little Alfred looked up and said again, 'I am sorry, mamma,' she answered, 'Then we will ring for Brame and tell her so. Brame was good and faithful to me when

I was a little child, and I want you to be very kind to her, and take care of her, and make her happy now she is old.'

Mrs. Brame appeared in answer to the bell. She looked taken by surprise for a moment when she saw Alfred in tears by his mother's side.

'I am quite sorry, Brame: do forgive Alf, and I will try to be good always again.'

'I hope you will, Master Alfred; and Mrs. Brame said no more. Had there been only this one hard thought in her heart, it would no doubt have melted under the child's tears and confession: but Pride had reigned over her until she had hard thoughts of all, and she turned away from the child and from his mother's kind words with a feeling unsoftened because still unhumbled. Alfred went down with his mother, and when the door opened little Maud sprang up on her papa's knee, shouting 'Alf! Alf!' It was plain her infant spirit had felt his tears. Constance gave her little brother a kiss, but said nothing, knowing silence is a veil over faults.

'Papa, I have told Brame I am very sorry.'

'That is right: now you must do all you can to comfort poor Brame, and make her forget all this trouble.'

'I will try, papa. Can I be a brave knight if I do?'

'I hope you will be a brave man. A brave man is never ashamed to confess a fault; he has courage to say, "I ask your pardon: I am sorry for what I have done: I will do my best for the time to come." It is cowards who are afraid to look back and face their faults, and so try to hide and deny them.'

‘ But, papa, what would a brave knight do if a woman carried him away as Brame carried me ? ’

‘ Such things do not happen to brave knights, and brave boys have courage to bear a disappointment, and hold back their secrets for another time. What is the first battle every true soldier fights, Alfy ? ’

‘ I don’t know, papa. ’

‘ A true soldier’s first battle is with himself, and he never gives in until he has conquered—conquered himself. You fought with poor Brame and were obliged to give in ; but if you had fought with yourself you might have won the day, like a true soldier. ’

‘ How fight myself, papa ? ’

‘ If you had put down your angry temper, and stood the disappointment like a man, and said, “ Thank you, Brame, I will go ; you shall hear all another time, Mercy ; ” then you would have won the day in a hard fight. But you forgot then that you were a soldier, forgot the Banner you fight under, and forgot your Captain’s eye, Alfred. Do you remember all now ? ’

‘ Yes, papa. ’

‘ Who is your Captain, Alfy ? ’

‘ Our Lord Jesus Christ, papa. ’

‘ And what is written on His Banner ? ’

‘ “ God is Love, ” ’ Alfy answered.

‘ Then, you see, you lost the day because you, a poor little soldier, forgot the Banner, and forgot your Captain. You must remember that He saw it all, and you must ask Him to forgive you and to teach you how to conquer yourself : then He will own you as His own little soldier, and you will gain the victory through Him. ’

As they went into the hall to morning prayers, Alfred took his mother's hand and said, 'Mamma, I am going to ask our Lord Jesus to teach me to conquer myself;' and the mother kissed the bright young brow, and thought of the hour when she pledged her boy in faith as the soldier of the Cross, and her silent spirit looked up in earnest supplication that he might indeed fight manfully under that banner, and continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end.

The household were all assembled at prayers. Brame looked still unbending and stern; there was a shade of trouble on Mercy's sweet face; and Mrs. Cox gave one anxious look of inquiring care to little Alfred. It so happened, that the Holy Scripture in the course of reading for the morning was the fifth chapter of the First Epistle of St. Peter. When the words were read, 'Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder; yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble:' it was as if the words had been chosen for the occasion. It is well worthy of observation how continually the portion of Holy Scripture, chosen without reference to the events or words of the day, yet is found to have a direct bearing upon them: this is the infinite embracing the finite. Little Alfred listened and heard them; it was to him the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ binding on his obedient heart the lessons and precepts his parents had taught him, and, young as he was, he never forgot them. Mrs. Brame heard them also, but they passed unheeded by her, for she had not as yet the spirit of a little child; and our Saviour has said, that except we humble ourselves

as a little child we cannot even enter the kingdom of heaven.

Little Alfred looked up at Mrs. Brame as she went out. He saw the displeasure on her face, and thought it must be because she was unhappy, and he had not comforted her. Poor Brame! she was not happy; she had never been very happy in her life, for she had always found occasions for unhappiness around her; and those who do this in childhood and youth will be sure to find these occasions for unhappiness increase as they grow older. The young in years, if they wish life to be happy, must always look out, on all occasions, for the blessings that every pathway abounds in, rejoicing in these with thankful hearts to the all-gracious Giver. If they do this a light will be reflected on trial, and they will learn as life advances that most wondrous truth, that even in the pathway of tribulation 'the joy of the Lord is your strength.'

Alfred did not stay downstairs, as usual, until fetched by Sally Millington, but climbed the long nursery staircase alone. He did not feel quite happy because he had not said the words of his own Morning Prayer. He found no one in the nurseries, so he went to his own little cot, where kneeling down he prayed his Morning Prayer, and added these words of his own:—

'Oh, Lord Jesus, forgive Alfy for all I have done; teach me to be a good soldier and conquer myself, and make Brame quite well and happy. Amen.' Then he said 'Our Father, which art in heaven,' as he always did, and rose up content.

Betty Cox had heard the little step upon the stairs, and

hastened into the nursery, but from the inner room she heard the low, sweet voice of prayer ; and Betty Cox in her own heart prayed little Alf's prayer with him, then left the nursery again that he might not feel disturbed. It is not all children who have such a nurse as Betty Cox to pray for and with them, but every little child may have a Friend in heaven to pray for them, and to put their prayers into the heart of their heavenly Father.

Betty Cox left the nursery when the short prayer was ended, and went herself to fetch Constance and Maud. Little Alfred found himself still alone ; and now he began to think what he could do to make Brame happy. Those who really pray for others always try to do all they can to comfort them in trouble. Alfred thought a little while, then he remembered his last little toy, the greatest favourite of all, which his papa had brought him from London not long before. It was a little mouse that ran by itself, not a living mouse, but a mouse with wheels inside, wound up like a watch, and when wound up it would run very fast round the table. This, he thought, must make Mrs. Brame quite happy ; it was the greatest treasure of all his toys, but he did not mind about that if he could only make Brame happy. So he folded it up in his pinafore, held the little key that wound it up tight in his hand, and went to look for Brame. His grandmamma was the delight of Alfred's heart, nothing could be done without her ; he always found her ready and able to listen, and all his little plans were told to her. So on his way he knocked at her door. Mercy opened it.

'Your grandmamma is not quite ready, Master Alfred ; you must come again presently.'

‘No, Mercy, that will not be in time. I do want just to whisper to grandmamma now.’

Grandmamma heard, and answered from within, ‘Come then, and tell me.’

Alfred looked at Mercy, who understood in a moment, and stepping outside shut the door and waited there, delighted to see again the bright, eager expression on the face of the boy, happy herself because he was happy.

Alfy unfolded his pinafore and showed the long tail of the mouse. ‘Grandmamma, I am going to give this to Brame. I want to make her quite happy: but no one knows. Don’t tell, grandmamma; now I must go.’ And, scarcely waiting for the kiss that so often pressed his brow, hastened away; he gave one kind look at Mercy when Alfie he saw how safe she had stood outside the door, and went on to his mother’s room, where Mrs. Brame was most likely then to be.

‘Oh, Brame, I want you!’

Again the door was shut heavily, and Brame felt a softening come over her at the child wishing to be with her alone.

‘Brame, look here what I have brought in my pinafore for you. Can you guess, Brame? something so pretty!’

Mrs. Brame stood by the child, but she did not guess; she did not try to guess, for she never saw any use in guessing.

‘Cannot you really guess, Brame? then I will show you. I have brought you my own dear little mouse!’ and Alfred uncovered a tail.

Mrs. Brame started and shuddered. ‘What has the boy got? Let it go, Master Alfie! here, child, let it go!’

and she seized in her dismay on the tongs from the fireplace.

‘Oh, Brame, don’t be frightened ! it won’t hurt you, indeed. It is my own little mouse : it is not alive, it goes with a key ;’ and Alfred drew out the whole mouse from the folds of his pinafore.

But Mrs. Brame still held the tongs in her hand, for the little black eyes of the mouse glittered bright, and he might well be suspected of life.

‘Look, Brame, he is such a beauty ! and he goes with this key ; and I will give him to you to play with when you are alone. Won’t it make you quite happy ? And if you cannot wind him up I am sure Mercy will.’

But Mrs. Brame was still hardly recovering the shock. At length, when Alfred had fitted the key in the hole on the side of the mouse, she felt persuaded it was only a toy, and exclaimed, ‘Well, they must be at their wits’ end to manufacture a mouse ! Such pests, to be sure ! I hate the sight of their peering eyes and ugly tails. I would not have the thing if they made it of gold ! Why, they used to run about almost by the dozen in my room in Ivy Lane ; and Smut, my old cat, if he only saw a tail he was sure of a bite.’

Little Alfred looked disappointed and rather bewildered, but, going back to his purpose, he said, ‘I wish you did like my dear little mouse, for then I could give him to you ; and now I don’t know how to make you quite happy !’

‘I am sure you are a darling,’ said Mrs. Brame, and a tear of remembrance started quick to her eye, as she thought upon yesterday. ‘I am sorry I was so cross — I am a poor, cross old woman at best ; but you shall have your own way next time !’

‘No, Brame; papa says I am a soldier, and I must conquer myself. I know what papa means: do you know, Brame?’

‘No, dear, I don’t.’

‘Papa means I must keep down my bad tempers, and mind what you say; and mamma says I must make you quite happy: but now you don’t like my little mouse, and I don’t know what to do!’

‘Should you like a real live mouse?’ asked Mrs. Brame, her aversion to the creature yielding to the pleasure of the child in his toy, and the boy’s generous feeling waking up her own in response.

‘Yes, I should like a little live mouse very much; can your old cat get one for me?’

‘Poor Smut! no, he is dead and gone: but I think I can order it for all that.’

‘Did your cat die?’ asked Alf, in a tone of compassion.

‘Yes, indeed, I lost him; so of course he was killed, or he would have come back again. Should you like me some day to tell you about him?’

‘Yes, do!’ replied Alf; ‘tell me now.’ But Betty Cox stood at the door. She had been looking for little Alfred herself, afraid to trust a messenger so soon after his trouble, and now she stood at the door, not a little surprised to find him in solitary companionship with Mrs. Brame.

Alfred turned to his nurse, saying, ‘Brame will tell us a story about her poor cat who died! Will you come after lessons to-day, Brame? because you see it rains, and we cannot go out.’

And Mrs. Cox hoped Mrs. Brame would come, and Mrs. Brame promised.

CHAPTER IV.

Mrs. Brame had never made any attempt to relate a story before. And now to go to the nursery by engagement, to know her story was an expected interest, to have to relate it not only to the children, but before Mrs. Cox and Sally Millington,—all this had rather a formidable look to Mrs. Brame, as any one can well understand who is committed for the first time to a public recital. Mrs. Brame began to call up the forgotten past, to collect her materials, but she found she must trust to the moment for compilation and expression. Added to this, Mrs. Brame did not feel quite herself; her spirit had been vexed in the last two days, and though she tried to brave it out and think every one wrong but herself, still a softening had come over her under the love of the little Ministering Boy, who had brought her his favourite toy in the longing to make her happy. And with this softening there came a misgiving, whether she had been quite right herself in all she had done and felt towards others. But the time arrived, and Mrs. Brame, who had never failed in a promise, made her way to the nursery, and found all in readiness there. Constance had made what she called ‘a little house’ with chairs in a circle. A large chair for Mrs. Brame, and small chairs for herself and Alfred. Betty Cox on her low nursery-seat was at work,

constrained by Constance to sit in the circle, little Maud at her feet ; and Sally Millington by the nursery-table, also at her needle. The elder children rose to welcome Mrs. Brame and conduct her to her chair. Mrs. Brame felt unusually nervous, but made the best of necessity and began :—

‘ Before I came up here I lived in Ivy Lane. I had a comfortable room there, respectable enough and quite sufficient for one ; but it was a lonely life. I had not a friend, not one I could neighbour with, no one to care for, and none who cared for me ; it was enough to try the spirits, a life so lonely as that !’

‘ Did no one live there ?’ asked little Constance, with sympathy.

‘ Yes, indeed, there were people in plenty, but no one respectable enough to make up to me ; but, having once settled there, I did not care to move. The houses had been good in their day, but they were a great age, and some were grown over with ivy, the stems as big as my arm. It was my native place, that gave me a fancy for it. My parents had a whole house and kept a shop there when I was a child. I remember the ivy then, and the old look of the place.

‘ The houses were as old as they could be to stand, and yet handsome and good in their way, but some of them were run over with rats. If I had once seen a rat in my room I could not have stayed to see a second, but, somehow, we had nothing but mice. I set traps till I was tired, and loathed the sight of dead mice. Then the woman below, who let out the rooms, said there was a stray cat about, and if I liked to entice it it would be glad enough of a home.

Such a cat I never had seen! You could not tell its colour: it was not black, but something near that, and I called it Smut. It had a lean, savage look, and seemed fierce enough to kill mice by one flap of its paw. I cannot think now where it came from, for there were mice enough in Ivy Lane to have fattened cats by the dozen. Well, I enticed him with a little milk, and a bone now and then, for I thought anything to be rid of the mice! though the look of the cat at first seemed almost as bad. He soon made a home by my fire, and sat washing his face and purring away, until he grew as fat and as sleek as the best cat you could see. He was a monster for size, and such a handsome cat too, every one who saw him was envying me. And as to a mouse I never saw and scarce heard one. He was so fond of me, and had ways like a dog; and I found him quite company in my lonely life there, for I had given up what nursing I once did, and was always at home. He never once strayed away; and so we lived on until it was fixed for me to come here, and I began to think what I should do with Smut; for cats are such creatures for places, I knew he would not settle up here at his time of life. And now comes the sad part of my story.

‘There was a young lady used to come to our house, very young to be in and out there alone, for she was nothing more than a child for age, I am sure, though she had pleasant ways above her years. They said she did wonders; she had such a gentle way with the rough men that they minded her words, and she persuaded the women to keep things more tidy, and the sick thought her an angel; but for all that she was poor, they said, and it was not for her gifts that they cared for her; for they fancied she some-

times wanted comforts herself. I don't know how that might be, I am sure, for I never troubled myself about other people's concerns, but they said that her father was an officer, quite blind, and his property lost, so he only lived on his pension, and she had no mother !'

'Did she look very unhappy?' asked little Constance.

'I can't say I took any notice of that,' replied Mrs. Brame; 'she always spoke civilly when I saw her, and would ask how I was if my door stood open; but I never asked her in, for I had no mind to have any one come looking after me; but when I found I was going I thought I would ask her in the next time that she came, and find out if I could what really did bring her so often about in that persevering way. There was a man, too, lying bad in the house in a decline; I had never been in after him, for it was not my way, but I thought, as this young girl was often there, I might hear all from her. So the next time that I heard her step pass my door—I always knew the light foot if my door were ajar—I stepped quickly to it, and asked her to come in. But a wretched dog came in after her, such a dog, too, for size! and, before I knew what I did, Smut looked this way and that, and made straight up the chimney. I never was so angry before; I shut her out and the dog, and called and called up the chimney till my neck ached for days. I kept milk on the hob, but it was all of no use. I dare not light a fire to boil the kettle for tea, but put on my bonnet and went straight for the sweep; he searched the chimney, but said there was no cat up there. Oh, what I did feel when I first lighted a fire! If I could have had my way that dog should have died for the mischief he did me that day, and a good riddance, too, to get such a

wretched starving cur put out of the way, and so I told the young lady when she came to inquire. She was beginning with excuses for him, but I had no mind to hear them, so I wished her good day and shut the door; for what use were excuses? they could not bring the cat back to me. Well, she went and had him cried; I heard the town-crier myself: but that was no use neither, for it never brought him back.

‘The next week, the woman whose husband was dying spoke to me on the stairs, and said the young lady laid it greatly to heart, and that the dog was not hers, but belonged to a blind man who made baskets at the end of our lane: she, I suppose, had a feeling for him, her father being blind. The woman said she always took the dog something in a little basket on her arm, but that day she had nothing, and the dog, seeing the basket, followed her without her knowing. Well, I said, it might be so, but my cat was gone, and all through the means of that good-for-nothing dog. The woman turned away and said, “If you were not shut up so close you would know more about these things than my words can tell you!” After this I had nothing more to say to her, for what business had she to remark on my ways? When the wind howled in the chimney, how often I thought it was Smut! but he never came back any more. The young lady did not know I was going away, and the day before I left to come here she came to my door; I said I was busy, but she opened her shawl, and on her arm there sat the handsomest kitten I think I ever saw, with a little red collar on. She said she was so grieved for what had happened! She hoped I would forgive her and the poor dog, and accept this kitten; she knew that its mother was a capital mouser. Well, I am

afraid now I did wrong, for I never told her I was going away : I did not want to tell her my affairs, so I only said, " Kittens were not in my way, my old cat suited me." So I let her go, but I saw the tears in her eyes, and I wish now I had asked her in and said something civil.'

The story of Smut kept up the children's interest, but did not brighten their faces, and when it ended they looked round at Betty Cox.

' Poor Smut !' said Betty Cox; and little Maud echoed ' Poor 'Mut !'

' I wonder where Smut is ?' said Alfred to Betty Cox.

' I should not wonder,' said Mrs. Cox, ' if Smut were sitting again in his old place on the hearth.'

' No !' said Mrs. Brame; ' do you think so ?'

' I think it very likely,' replied Mrs. Cox. ' Cats are curious creatures ; I have known many facts about them you could hardly credit.'

' Where is the young lady and that pretty kitten ?' asked Constance.

' I don't know,' replied Mrs. Brame.

' Did she cry because you would not have the kitten ?'

' I am afraid she did,' replied Mrs. Brame; ' and if Smut should be safe after all, I shall not know how to forgive myself, for I had been worrying my mind to know what I should do with him when I came here.' Mrs. Brame saw that her story had rather a dismal effect, and whispered to Alf, ' I shall see about a real little mouse !' Alf smiled; Constance looked in wonder what this secret could be; but Alf said, ' Come here in this corner, Consy, and I will tell you. I am to have a real live

little mouse, to run without a key— Brame says so: but it is quite a secret; you must not tell, for I want to surprise mamma!’

And why is it that a secret has such a power to charm? that not childhood alone but older life yields to its spell? Its mystery lies deeper than our nature, in the heart of our God. He reveals His secrets to those in communion with Him. ‘The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.’ The closer we live to the heart of our God the more of His secrets shall we learn from Him, too blessed to find expression in words, thrilling life with a joy that the stranger intermeddleth not with, and ever deepening and strengthening the tie that binds us to Him in confidence, and love.

Mrs. Brame left the children, but not now, with any self-satisfaction; she had told the tale of the past, but even while she recalled it, it fell hard and cold: she did not know why, it seemed to her a different thing now; but the reason was that the love of that ministering child had touched the heart of Mrs. Brame; he and his little mouse had crept into it together, and found it warm within, and left the door open for others. Children can often do a work that those older might fail in, they can enter hearts that are shut against others; if only their longing be to make every-one happy around them, He who was once a child will show them the way.

It was a heavy day to Mrs. Brame, her thoughts kept wandering back over these scenes of the past, and each time with less approval of herself. She made an excuse to visit the nursery again, but only little Maud was there,

and Sally Millington at work. On seeing Mrs. Brame little Maud exclaimed, 'Mut ! 'Mut !' and Mrs. Brame said, 'How like the babe is to her mother ! I never knew her to forget the trouble of which she heard when a child.' Mrs. Brame retiring, Sally Millington snatched up the little Maud, and, careering round the room, sang as she danced,—

'Smut's in the chimney,
Dance and sing !
Smut's in the chimney,
Ding, dong, ding !'

But this roundelay had not the desired effect, little Maud did not laugh nor crow ; and on finding herself again on the floor she pointed to the fire, saying no less gravely again, 'Mut ! 'Mut !' upon which Sally Millington was compelled to give up her attempt to turn tragedy into comedy for little Maud.

The evening came, and the Lady Gertrude sent for Mrs. Brame, looking forward with but little hope to the result of the interview. Lady Gertrude had often tried to show Mrs. Brame her mistake in one point or another, but it had always failed. Brame had a reason for all, in some fault in others. This evening Lady Gertrude thought within herself, 'It is no use to try and show Brame that she is wrong in giving way to her temper: I can only fall back on the Word of God, and give her a precept by which to test her life from that word ; it may show her what I cannot, for "the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light !"'

'Now, Brame, I promised this evening to talk over our troubles together.'

Mrs. Brame had almost forgotten the trouble of yesterday. All the hard feeling of that had melted away under little Alfred's warm care to make her happy ; but she was not at rest, her thoughts were still wandering over the past. She felt a misgiving of not having been in the right, and a bewildering sense of all things had come over her ; she wanted something to guide her, more certain and clear than her own erring judgment. So it is that, when the time is come for the arrow of the Divine Word to penetrate, the heart is prepared to receive it. He who ordains the one, orders also the other ; while often no link of earthly connexion exists between the two. These both 'worketh that one and the self-same Spirit,' whose first beam on the soul is conviction of sin.

'I want to find out, Brame, why you are not happy amongst us, as I had hoped you would be. It often grieves me to see that things are not pleasant to your feelings, nor to others around you. It should not be so, because you are my oldest friend in this house. I want you here to help me, and I am sure this is your wish.'

Mrs. Brame was silent ; she could not give the self-justifying, or self-excusing answer, that at any former time would have been ready.

After waiting awhile the Lady Gertrude spoke again : 'I have been thinking much of you all the day, Brame. Your comfort must always be dear to me ; and I am sure, when others are not at ease with you, you cannot have real peace yourself. We know the Bible contains a key to unlock every difficulty in our daily life, if we have only the patient trust to look until we find it. It appears to me that there is an exhortation given us by our Lord, that,

if obeyed, would help you out of all that disquiets you now. You remember His words when He says, "Do good and lend, hoping for nothing again, and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest, for He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful." This is our rule as given us by our Lord Himself, and we cannot take one part of it and reject another. He says, "We are to do good and lend, hoping for nothing again." Is not this the key we want? "Hoping for nothing again!" Now it is quite right that you should have the love of the children, and the respect of the household, and the consideration of all, but the mistake is in always being on the watch for this, expecting it as a right, not receiving it as a free gift. The scripture we know cannot be broken, and, therefore, the only way of success is in following that way in which the Word of God leads us, and He says, "Hoping for nothing again." The very reason why you have not these right and pleasant things may be because you forget this divine rule, and look for them. I know it is not an easy thing to us naturally, but it is the only Christ-like way of doing good; and it is not until we are able to lose the thought of ourselves that we can find how true, even in this life, are the words of our Lord, "Your reward shall be great;" for, "in keeping His commandments there is great reward." Tell me, Brame, is not this the secret cause of your want of personal happiness, and of your failure in making others happy? Does it not lie in the not observing those few clear strong words of our Lord, "Hoping for nothing again?"

'I don't know, I am sure,' replied Mrs. Brame.

'Then, Brame, will you not try to find out whether it is so or not? Set this one rule before you, walk in the light of it, and you will soon discover whether you have the secret key to open your difficulty.'

Mrs. Brame was silent.

'Who can help you on earth, Brame, if not your own old child and friend? I want you to find out for yourself whether you have remembered this commandment to do it?'

'No, I am afraid not,' at length Mrs. Brame replied, 'nor any other. I am a proud, hard old woman, and there is no good in me!'

Mrs. Brame's heart had melted within her. She poured out this confession with tears. And the Lady Gertrude wept with her—a gush from her heart of thankful love as she said, 'Dear Brame! We have found our right level when we learn out that truth, that there is no good in us; from that point our way is upward—the pathway that shineth brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins; and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." You and I are bound by a new tie to-night, the strongest by which friends can be bound—the light and love of that Holy Spirit, whose first teaching is the convincing of sin. Let us often speak of these things, and our life together will soon gather blessings it has not known before.' Lady Gertrude, as she rose to go, stooped and kissed her old nurse, and they parted in deeper feeling than had ever united them before.

That night the aged woman knelt in the same humble spirit as the little child in the morning. She could only weep

forth the words, 'I have done the things I ought not, and left undone the things I ought to have done, and there is no health in me !' But she remembered the promise, 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,' and, in the faith of that promise, she lay down to sleep. Yet, in her waking hours, life's retrospect was sad ; how could it be otherwise with one who had lived to herself ? What is there in self to repay us at last ? What but a blank that can bring us no return save disappointment and vexation of spirit ? When Brame slept she dreamed one while of that young motherless girl, the blind officer's child, turning away from her unrelenting face, with the kitten on her arm, and the tears in her eyes. Then she heard the words of the poor woman again saying, 'If you had not lived shut up so close, you would have known more of these things than my words can tell you !' and she awoke with a troubled heart, and a feeling of life gone, and all its opportunities of blessing passed, not to be recalled any more. There was anguish in these feelings, for the light of truth revealed the past, and she needed none to condemn her now ; her own heart did that.

Then she saw in her thoughts little Alfred standing before her, looking up with that dear, earnest face, saying, 'I want to make you quite happy ;' and the child seemed to her a little messenger of heavenly love, and she felt she was not forsaken ; for he had touched the secret spring, and by his self-forgetting love opened the frozen fount of affection within her. Mrs. Brame rose the next day with a sadness quite unlike all her former displeasure—a sadness so gentle that it made others gentle, and

had more of the sweetness of heaven in it than any feeling ever seen in Mrs. Brame before. She felt the altered tone of the voices around her—a kindness lay in them that to her breathed of forgiveness; and what can be so blessed to the heart that feels its transgressions, as the sense of forgiveness on earth and in heaven?

CHAPTER V.

WHEN the children came to their mother's room the next morning Mrs. Brame was there. Alfred looked up at her, and she read again in the child's speaking eyes the question, 'Are you quite happy now?' and under this solicitude there sparkled a thought of the live little mouse. Mrs. Brame had not been used to think of little pleasures for others, and until now she would certainly have considered that to purchase a mouse was as great a folly and waste of money as could possibly be. But, as we said before, Alfred had knocked at the door of Mrs. Brame's heart, with his little mouse in his hand as the palm-branch of peace, and Mrs. Brame had taken both in, the child and the mouse, and all the warmth of her feeling was glowing round them now. Indeed, Mrs. Brame felt almost as eager as a child to find the best way to get, as soon as might be possible, this live little mouse, that the boy might feel the grateful response of her love to his! This wish to give pleasure was new to Mrs. Brame, and it was like a mountain stream in its first flow down its rocky bed, dashing impatiently along, making itself all-important by its murmur and spray; not like the same stream when years have worn it a deep channel, and it glides silent and softly along, and you only mark its presence by the verdure it leaves on either side as it flows.

Mrs. Brame decided in her own mind that Mercy would be the best person to consult about the mouse. She did not fear any resentment from Mercy for the troubles now past, for a sense of forgiveness had come over her heart. So the first opportunity she had she asked Mercy whether she could put her in the way for getting a live mouse, saying she thought perhaps Mr. William Smith could manage it for her, if he would be so kind. Mercy gladly promised to inquire, and when she asked William, he said he would send Mrs. Brame any number she wished, with very great pleasure, alive and in good condition, just fresh from the barns; but if Mrs. Brame would like a superior sort of mouse, there was a man in the town who tamed little brown and white mice for sale. He was going in to market alone the next day, and if he might offer Mrs. Brame a seat in his gig he should be most happy to drive her in, and go with her to the man; or if she preferred, he would bring her out a mouse on approval. Mrs. Brame was much pleased with William Smith's proposal to drive her in to the town the next day. She felt a great respect for Farmer Smith and his family, and now that light from heaven was shed on her pathway, its fair hues fell on all things around.

Then to get such a mouse as little Alfred would not expect—a little brown mouse, and tame, and so quickly, too, before the child's expectation had cooled by delay! Mrs. Brame was very much obliged, and would certainly go. 'Should she walk down to the farm to start with him there?'

'No,' replied Mercy, 'he would be most happy to drive up to the Hall and take her from the door:' so the

plan was settled, and Mrs. Brame was to go the next day at eleven. All day Mrs. Brame at intervals thought of the mouse, and the pleasure of the child, and the going in to procure it. But when evening came, and Mrs. Brame was alone in her room, other thoughts crowded in on her mind. She was going into the town, she must needs be there for some hours; should she revisit Ivy Lane? She had never been there since the day, nearly two years before, when she left it to live at the Hall.

Mrs. Brame had no friends in Ivy Lane; she thought there were none there for her to make friends of: she did not know as yet that our having real friends depends far more on ourselves than on others, and that real friends may be found in every station of life. Mrs. Brame had looked with hard eyes on all, and they never gather into their focus the tender lights and shades that are reflected from every neighbourhood of our fellow-men. So poor Mrs. Brame had no friends to revisit. But she could not forget Mrs. Cox's surmise, that perhaps after all Smut might still be living there, content on his old hearth without her. Then Mrs. Brame thought again of the blind officer's child, and the lean dog that came with her on that fatal day when Smut fled up the chimney, and he was the blind basket-maker's dog; at least so Mrs. Garson had said,—the woman whose husband then lay dying. Mrs. Brame did not know the blind basket-maker; it was the low end of Ivy Lane where he lived, and Mrs. Brame made a habit of avoiding that way: but, of course, he was poor, and why should a poor man keep such a dog? That went against him, Mrs. Brame thought.

The morning arrived—a clear healthful autumn morning. Mrs. Brame was ready before time, and twice took out her purse and counted five shillings. It was not Mrs. Brame's habit to carry much in her purse; she said, If the money were not with you, you were less likely to spend: to spend and to waste seemed to express one and the same idea to Mrs. Brame; and probably this was the reason why, in the course of a long life, she had spent very little. Mrs. Brame had dividends in the Bank, some shares in gas-works that lighted the town, besides a rather large hoard that was laid up in her chest. Mrs. Brame liked the feeling of wealth; she thought it raised her to a higher position in life than could be claimed by the poor; it gave her importance, entitled her to respect: but that cannot be truly our wealth which may at any moment be separated from us. The only true riches are those from which we cannot be parted, a treasure laid up in the heavens, and safe in the hearts of others, eternal, immortal like ourselves, the cause of rejoicing for ever. And the comfort is, that the gold and the silver may be turned into these true riches here. Centuries ago, many men spent their time and their skill in trying to discover a stone that would turn all things to gold; even kings thought it worth while to try experiments with this hope: but this stone could never be forged in any laboratory here. Yet there is such a one dropped from heaven into hearts open to receive it; its name is Charity, the excellent gift of God; it turns all things to the true wealth of heaven; gold tried in the fire, those true riches that no moth nor rust can corrupt, and no thief break in to


destroy; and when the final estimate of true wealth is taken, some of the poorest of this world will be found amongst the richest for ever.

On this market-day five shillings did not appear so large a sum as before to Mrs. Brame. This made her count it twice; it was five shillings, neither less nor more. A mouse could not cost much — why, then, thought Mrs. Brame, should not this five shillings be enough? What could be the use of taking more, to bring it back again, and run the risk, perhaps, of losing it? This was only common sense; yet just at the last Mrs. Brame hurried again to her chest, took out two sovereigns, and put them safe in her purse. It was an impulse, she could never tell why; and so she started comfortably buttoned into the farm gig, and William Smith to drive her—not with young Nora, he feared the skittish ways of the young horse might alarm her, he said; so Black Beauty drew them steadily along, and looked, as Mrs. Brame kindly observed, ‘remarkably handsome.’

The drive was a pleasant one, as it was likely to be with two persons disposed to be pleased, and a horse who took a quiet pleasure in trotting along. It was agreed to drive straight, as usual, to the Golden Fleece, where Farmer Smith always stabled his horse: he used to say he was afraid the house was not much the better for custom from him; but the innkeeper would not allow this, saying it was custom enough to have him known to frequent there.

When the horse was stabled, William was to accompany Mrs. Brame to the house of the poor man who sold mice, and then the meeting for the return was to be at the

Golden Fleece, at half-past three o'clock, as William was always home from market in good time for the early farm tea. On arriving, Mrs. Brame waited until William was ready in the inn-parlour. Her appearance entitled her to respect; but William found an opportunity of whispering to the landlady, 'Mrs. Brame, from the Hall!' upon which all due civilities were abundantly offered. William soon appeared as her escort into the town; and Mrs. Brame's respect for William did not lessen as she observed how many merchants, farmers, and tradesmen, took pleasant notice of him as they passed along. They crossed the Cornhill; walked the length of the street where Mr. Mansfield's large shop looked as flourishing as ever; then they walked down Stone Lane, and came out into Friars Street, where, in a little bit of back-garden, behind its more respectable houses, lived a poor man who had built up his own wooden cottage, which he shared with a pale little elderly wife and creatures that, in earlier days, Mrs. Brame would have described under the sweeping term of vermin. But Mrs. Brame was now capable of entertaining a feeling of regard for a mouse, and she stood without a perceptible shudder in the midst of brown mice and white mice, and little squirrels whirling round in vain hope of a nut. Mrs. Brame still retained her composure, though peering eyes and long tails turned in every direction. She was greatly divided as to the purchase of a brown mouse or a white, and as William considered it a question of taste he did not like to presume to give an opinion. But the pale little old woman put in her advice: 'Now the best way of settling is just to buy in the two, and this lovely little house for them both to bide in;



there's a chamber and parlour all lined soft as down. Now have it complete, or I know you'll be vexing to think you just left it for the next as steps in.'

The little inhabited house did look tempting to any one not possessed with a natural aversion to mice. And Mrs. Brame thought of those dear eyes that had looked up to her with such a great disappointment when she would not welcome the toy: of course he knew nothing of the plague that mice were, when he expected her to be delighted with his! Yet she pondered still, and stood undecided. Mrs. Brame did not see the anxious eye of the poor merchant in mice, how it watched her in fear and in hope, for rent-day was near, and the balance wanted in hand would almost be complete if that purchase were made; but how could Mrs. Brame stretch her imagination so far as to suppose any second reason for the purchase of mice? 'What are they?' again inquired Mrs. Brame.

'Now,' said the little elderly wife, 'only just one shilling for the brown mousey, and two for the white, and eighteen-pence for the little house that they bide in, and two such toward dears you won't light on again. If you will believe me they have slept under my pillow, and run about at our meals, now in this plate, now in that, just nibbling a bit where they please, as sensible, too, as if they had not been born mice!'

Mrs. Brame gave a shiver, but she paid down the money, and returned the sixpence in change to her purse, not without a secret feeling that it would prove as the letting out of water, and that she should never again have the firm hand she had before over pounds, shillings, and pence. She did not see the gleam that suffused the face

of the seller of mice, nor the twinkle of joy in the grey eyes of his pale-looking wife. But these things were so, though Mrs. Brame saw them not, and her purchase had lightened the load weighing down two honest hearts on that day. The little brown mouse and the white mouse were packed in their snug house, with small holes for breathing, and William took them in charge, for it was not possible that Mrs. Brame could feel comfortable with two little mice in her pocket or bag. Final arrangements were again made for the return home in the evening, and Mrs. Brame left the close quarters of mice.

Mrs. Brame now determined to revisit Ivy Lane. She had time on her hands, and her thoughts turned on Smut. She soon reached the Lane—it looked dreary and dull after the fair haunts of her present abode. Her eye soon fell on the old familiar house; the door was standing open, the woman who let the rooms did not seem within. Mrs. Brame went up the old familiar staircase, wide and easy, with a hole here and there, and other signs of a not very distant decay. She passed the door of the room where poor Patience lived when a child: that room was a small one, and had afterwards been occupied by the poor woman whose husband lay dying when Mrs. Brame left the house. The door was shut, and Mrs. Brame supposed the widow might be living there still. Then ascending to the second floor, the door of her own pleasant airy room was before her. She knocked at the door, and a sharp-featured woman looked out, and Mrs. Brame said,—

‘May I step in for a minute? I once lived in this room, and I felt a wish to see it again, and to make an inquiry of you.’

'Pray walk in,' said the woman; and she offered a chair.

The room could hardly be thought the same; its walls were dirty and ragged, the floor was unswept, and two or three children, unwashed and ill-mannered, looked most uninviting. Mrs. Brame inquired,—

'Have you, since you lived here, seen a cat about the place? a large smoke-coloured tabby!'


'Not in here,' said the woman; 'I have no room for cats, and I have not been here more than a month, but I have seen such a cat on the stairs: he keeps, I think, with the widow who lives in the attic above. I hear the bailiff is coming to sell her up to-day, so there will be an end for her and the cat.'

Mrs. Brame rose up in impatience from her seat, and saying 'That, no doubt, is the cat,' she wished the woman 'Good-day,' and climbed the steeper old staircase that led up to the attic above. The door before her was open, and Mrs. Brame looked in. The little room was poorly furnished indeed, but all was neatness and order; the fireplace was empty and swept, and by its side on a stool sat a child thinly clad, her elbows on her knees, her face hid in her pinafore, which was wet with her tears. Before the child sat a cat of large size, not sleek as if high fed, but in good condition, as one who found no lack of mice. The cat did not turn at the step of a stranger, he was looking up at the child as if in sympathy with sorrow.

'Why, Smut, I declare!' exclaimed Mrs. Brame, and she stooped to caress her old favourite. But Smut had no memory for the friend of past years, 'out of sight' was

‘out of mind’ in the affections of Smut, and finding himself suddenly uplifted in the arms of a stranger, he put out a strong paw with sharp claws at the end. Mrs. Brame set him down with a pat of displeasure, and he took up his place still closer to the child. Mrs. Brame seated herself on a chair that was near, with a feeling of vexation that cannot well be described. She had taken in the cat in his outcast condition, fed him, caressed him, fretted over the loss of him, and all for what? for a savage scratch when she saw him again! Had this befallen Mrs. Brame only a few days before, she would, it is to be feared, have turned away in disgust, and said there was no such thing as gratitude in the world! quite forgetting that she had only made one trial, and that with a cat, and that even Smut might reply he had paid well for his lodging by catching her mice. But to-day Mrs. Brame did not turn away, the door of her inmost heart had been opened by one little ministering boy in his self-denying love; and the heart that has been once opened does not readily close up again. Mrs. Brame looked from Smut to the child, and asked, ‘What ails you? What are you crying for? And how came this cat here with you?’ But the child gave no answer, and still hid her face and her tears. Mrs. Brame did not know how to get a reply. In her surprise at seeing Smut really before her she had forgotten what the woman had told her below; but steps had been heard on the staircase, and a poor widow came in, leading a delicate-looking little boy with a broom in his hand. The poor widow looked a moment at Mrs. Brame in surprise, and then said,—

‘I beg your pardon, ma’am; had you heard of your cat?’



‘No,’ replied Mrs. Brame; ‘but I did come to inquire, and found you had taken him in.’

‘He came back,’ said the widow, ‘the week after you left, and tried hard for his old place, I suppose, in your room; but the door was kept locked, and the next lodgers who came were no friends to dumb creatures, and my children took to him; and so, as no one else had a kind word to give him, he followed us up here, and he is wonderful fond of the children: poor things!’ And the widow’s voice faltered, and she turned away as if to hide the emotions she could not repress.

Mrs. Brame felt ashamed to refer to the trouble in which the poor woman was when she left nearly two years before, because she had then shown her no kindness; and hardly knowing what to say, she replied,—

‘There were plenty to praise up the cat when he sat by my fire. I should have thought many would have been proud to own him for their own.’

‘I don’t know,’ said the widow; ‘I suppose ’tis trouble shows the true friend!’

Mrs. Brame looked up, as if by constraint, on the face of the widow. The face was calm, though worn and pale, as with the trouble of years. She looked as one who had long contended with want, and was yielding at length to the stern grasp of woe, and parting with spirit before she parted with life. The poor woman sat down on a chair by the window, with the aspect of one who had nothing left on earth to strive for again. Mrs. Brame had never felt so much at a loss what to say, for there is a sacredness in sorrow that shields the broken-hearted from the rash intrusion of common inquiry. Mrs. Brame looked again at Smut; the

little boy had left his broom, and laid himself down by the old cat, softly stroking him with his little thin hand, the whole length of his soft shining back. Smut stood upon his four feet, and stretched out his long tail, and returned the caress by an affectionate purring. The girl had ceased crying, and looked down on her little brother and the cat, but the blank sorrow in her face did not yield its expression.

The widow looked on her children tearless and calm. She knew she was dying, that her earthly life could not be long, and that day the stern necessity of workhouse arrangements was to part her from her children for ever on earth. She had toiled day and night, for each hour was precious that kept her children still in her sight; but work had been slack, the prices had fallen, and sometimes her feeble strength, too, had failed. No one had been hard on her; she had been allowed to try on, but the rent of her one room was now owing, past her own hope of repayment; the bailiff was coming, and the bitterness of death was even now passing over her soul, for its only bitterness to her was separation from her children.

Mrs. Brame broke the painful silence by asking the little boy what he did with that broom? The child looked up at his mother, who answered for him.

‘It was the only friend we have on earth who gave him that broom—Miss Cambell, who attended my poor husband to the last. It cut her to the heart to see us come to want, and she not know how to help; for she is a friend to them that need it, if ever there was one!’

It seemed a relief to the poor widow to speak out from her full heart the love it felt for a friend. Mrs. Brame knew well who it was, but asked again,—

‘What use could a broom be to the child?’

The widow had broken off in her answer, forgetting the broom, lost in thoughts of her friend, but she now answered again,—

‘Miss Cambell went to London, and said hundreds of little boys earned an honest penny there by sweeping the crossings, and Sammy could but try. So she bought him a little broom, and set him at a corner near home, where the market traffic lies, and he sweeps the crossing clean, and he has never had a rough word, and often brought home a penny. I have just been to fetch him, for we must part here to-night. I wanted him to sell his broom, seeing it was the child’s own; and the child was hungry, I knew: but he said to me, “Oh, mammy, she gave it me! and she always smiled when she passed me, and looked on my broom!” I am thankful, I am sure, she don’t know our trouble; she is away now with her father.’

‘Had you not three children?’ Mrs. Brame inquired.

‘Yes,’ said the widow; ‘the little one soon followed his father!’

‘That was a fresh trial for you,’ said Mrs. Brame, though with a secret feeling that a poor widow must be better off with two children than three.

‘Yes,’ answered the widow. ‘There’s such a miss in the babe! But God took him in mercy. ’Tis not God’s parting, but man’s that’s the hardest to bear!’

Just then a man’s footstep was heard on the stair. The poor widow knew the signal; she clasped her hands and looked up, a silent appeal to Heaven for strength in that hour. Mrs. Brame felt the shock, for she guessed whose was the footstep, having heard of the bailiff from

the woman below. She looked at the widow, at the children, at the door. The man had not entered yet. 'Take comfort,' she said, rising hastily; then hurrying out, she pulled to the door after her, and stood before the man. 'I wish to pay you the rent for this poor woman,' said Mrs. Brame. 'What is the amount?'

'That must be settled with the woman below,' said the man; 'it is she who has the letting.'

Mrs. Brame went downstairs with the bailiff. But it was not long before she climbed the long staircase again with a more eager step than she ever climbed it before. She opened the door, re-entered the room. The poor woman still sat where she had left her, her little boy clung to her knee, and Mrs. Brame heard him say, 'Oh, mammy, shall we still have a home?' Her other child stood by her side. 'The rent is all paid up to the end of this quarter!' said Mrs. Brame; 'let this be for food!' And she laid all the change from her two pounds on the table by the widow. The poor children looked on it in bewildered astonishment, then at their mother. The widow looked up again, her thin hands clasped to Heaven: 'My God hath sent His angel, and shut the lions' mouths that they have not hurt me!' she said. Mrs. Brame heard the words, but before the poor widow could turn to her, Mrs. Brame was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

WIDOW GARSON sat for a few moments overpowered by surprise, almost stunned by this sudden deliverance in the last moment, when all earthly expectation was gone. Then, warmed by the glow of life and hope reviving within her, she clasped her children to her heart, as though the lost had been found ; and kneeling down with them beside her, she wept forth her thanksgiving to God. It was long since a tear had cooled her burning cheek, it had seemed as if the fountain of tears were dried up within ; but when they flow no more for grief they will gush forth in joy, if gladness should yet again surprise the spirit on earth : and the widowed mother wept freely with Rachel and Sammy.

When recovering a little they looked again at the money, and thought of the rent paid to the end of the quarter on which they had entered, they felt encompassed with comfort ; and the little heap of silver that lay on the table shone bright as a mirror, in which their longing eyes saw reflected food, and firing, and clothing, and all the destitute need. Oh, well is it written, ‘ Blessed is he that considereth the poor : the Lord shall deliver him in the time of trouble.’ Widow Garson exclaimed, ‘ See, my children, how we have proven the truth of that blessed word, “ God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or

think." I did beg but a shelter to keep you by my side, and see, here is food and firing enough and to spare. Would that I could tell that dear young heart that weeps over us, how our heavenly Father has supplied all our need—and by Mrs. Brame, too! Who could ever have thought it? But you mind, children, we will read that chapter to-night where it is written, "My thoughts are not as your thoughts, nor my ways as your ways;" and then how it says, "For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth." How like it is to this, I am sure! It seems to me as if it had dropped down straight from above. We will buy a sheet of paper and send off a few lines. How long it seems before she can hear! But perhaps He who has given it to us may be comforting her up with trust in His mercy; so we must just wait in patience.'

Little Sammy was again on the floor, gently stroking the large head of the cat. 'Mammy,' he said, 'I think Smut is just like the ravens that fed the Prophet Elijah: hasn't he brought us bread? Do you think that God sent him? because, mammy, I do; and I think we had better read the chapter about it.'

'So we will, Sammy; and we will buy Smut a little milk, too.'

'There, Smut!' said little Sammy, 'do you hear? Mammy says we'll buy you some milk!—milk!' and Sammy sprang up, in the excitement, to his feet.

'Now I will step down and speak to Mrs. Simpson, and then I will run on to your poor uncle Benny. He is sorrowing for us, and little can he think how it's turned into joy! Here's a shilling, Rachel, and you can go to

the shop and get a loaf of bread, two ounces of tea, a quarter of a pound of brown sugar, and a little salt butter. And you, Sammy, take this shilling, and buy a bushel of coal and a bundle of wood. Go with Rachel, and don't lose your money.'

'Mammy, may I run in and tell little Sue and Uncle Benny that they must come in to tea?'

'Yes, if you want to be first with this good news; and say I am coming to tell him all about it directly.'

Widow Garson took out another shilling herself, and tied up the rest of the money in the corner of an old pocket-handkerchief, putting it safely away in her drawer. Then she hastened downstairs to speak to Mrs. Simpson, the woman who was employed to let out the rooms, and lived below on the ground-floor.

'Well, here's good fortune for you!' said Mrs. Simpson, in a tone of more kindness than might have been expected from so rough-looking a woman. 'I am sure I am thankful enough! I was then on the point of stepping out, for I couldn't stand to see the widow sold up and those children sent adrift without a roof over their head.'

'Then it's all right?' asked Widow Garson: 'the rent standing clear?'

'Yes; paid on to the quarter. Who could have believed it? That close-handed old woman, that I never knew give a penny all the years that she paid down her room's rent to me!'

'I believe that He who sent her knew what was in her heart,' replied Widow Garson. 'I pray He may reward her.'

Then Widow Garson hastened on to the end of Ivy

Lane, where the blind basket-maker lived, by name Benjamin Tovel, with his only child, little Sue, and his faithful dog Sharp. In the basket-maker's little shop Widow Garson found Sammy, with his arms round little Sue's neck, trying to comfort her tears, though she cried then for joy; while down the pale face of the blind man flowed the same tears of thanksgiving.

'Well, neighbour,' said the widow, 'you have heard the good news?'

'Yes,' answered the blind man: 'so unexpected and sudden, it's quite overcome me. And yet, now, it seems to me we should have looked for deliverance. But it's come, and we can only say, "He has put a new song in our mouth."' '

'Well, Master Tovel, you will come in to tea with us: we shall soon have it ready. How little I thought ever to sit down there in peace, with my children beside me! It still seems like a dream.'

'Now little Sue,' said Sammy, 'don't you cry any more. See here, I have a shilling, and I am off to buy coal; and Smut is to have a dish of milk for his tea; and, dear old Sharp, you come too.' And Sammy ran off for his coals and his wood.

Sammy found Rachel in the small general shop, waiting her turn to be served. The woman looked more than once at the child, as she had heard the report of the widow's things being sold up that day; and the happy face of the poor girl, and the shilling in her hand, looked like some mistake. But when little Sammy came in he ran up to the shop-mistress, who was stooping to ladle flour into a bag for a man waiting beside her, and getting close to

her ear Sammy whispered, 'Mammy's rent is all paid—we have still got a home!' Then he turned round to wait patiently by Rachel for his turn for the coals. When the mistress of the shop came to serve the two children she said, 'Tell your mother I am thankful for her, I am sure;' and then reaching out her hand she took a rasher of bacon, laid it in a paper, and gave it to Sammy, saying, 'Take that to your mother—'tis a relish for tea: her honest hands never owed me a penny! I shall sleep better to-night for knowing her own roof's over her.'

Little Sammy ran home with his wood and his bacon, Rachel coming slowly after with the man carrying the coals. Then the widow's little room was all active life: there was lighting the fire, and setting the tea, and making all ready. Then little Sue climbed the stairs, welcomed by Sammy; and the blind man followed after, led in by his dog; and Sammy turned from his welcome to little Sue to lend his tiny hand to help in the blind man; and they all sat down together. Smut showed no signs of fear when Sharp led in his master, but sat quietly on, without ceasing the purr of satisfaction he was giving to the fire. It was in his rich days that Smut was a coward; he had grown brave in his poverty; and besides this, on further acquaintance, he had every reason to think highly of Sharp, so they met with mutual good-will; and however tempting the fire looked to Sharp, he did not intrude near Smut's place on the hearth, but lay down at his master's feet, and watched the flames as they flickered, and saw the little tea-kettle boil.

'Here's your chair, Uncle Benny—sit down,' said Sammy, 'and I'll tell you all about what a supper we

have got. Sue and me are going each to have a basin of hot bread and milk. Mammy's crumbing the bread. Won't it be good, Uncle Benny? And Rachel's toasting some bacon for mother and you—Mrs. Newson gave me that to bring home to mother. And good old Smut, he will have a whole saucer of milk! And there's such a dear fire! Don't you feel right hot, Uncle Benny, I say?'

'Yes, Sammy, I do; and the day has felt chill. I don't think 'twas the weather, though; but my vexing for you. Who could have thought we should all be sitting round here! Why, if anybody had told us, it would have seemed too good to believe! That's the way with our weak faith, it can't trust to our God.'

Benjamin Tovel had sat with his hands leaning on his stick, and his head stooped a little to catch the eager words of the boy; then, directing his to the widow, he said, 'Oh, neighbour, "When the poor and needy seek water and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Jacob will not forsake them."'

'It is so, indeed,' replied the widow; 'and I might say, "He hath made the dry land springs of water," in more senses than one. I am sure, if I had been asked the last person in the world that I could have expected to help one out of trouble, I should have said Mrs. Brame; for she never seemed to know what trouble meant. When my poor husband lay dying she never set her foot in my door; and when she said hard words on that dear young angel God sent, to comfort him up with a blessed hope in his Saviour, I spoke out my mind; and when she left she

never said one word of good-bye. I remember I felt so bad about her that I took to praying for her, for she seemed almost like an enemy, so cold and so hard ; and yet, to see how she came herself to-day, and, when she found out my trouble, poured out of her goodness, as if her whole heart were all comfort. How I did feel my hard thoughts of her, to see that she, too, was an angel sent by God to deliver !'

' Ah,' said Benjamin Tovel, ' that's how it will be in heaven ; there will be one and another walking up there in light that we never knew here to be the children of our Father, and heirs of the kingdom He hath promised to them that love Him.'

So they talked on together, while waiting for tea to be ready. Sammy had got little Sue on the floor down by him, with Smut between them and the fire. ' I say, Sue,' whispered little Sammy, ' Smut's as good as a raven !' Benjamin Tovel caught the words, for the ear of the blind man was quick, and he said, ' That's a true word of the raven, Sammy. Smut is like the raven : God guides all His creatures as pleaseth Him. You watch for His hand, Sammy ; 'tis the Hand of your Father in heaven ; and, babe as you are, His love will be revealed unto you. I can see that Hand in my blindness, as clear as they that have light. I am always looking for it, and it supplies all my need.'

' It was only to-day,' said the widow, ' I did feel tempted to think that Good Hand had forsaken me. I had begged so hard to keep a home for the children the little while that I knew I might still have in this world. It seemed to me, as if to be parted from them while God

gave me life could not be His will, and so I could not make it mine.'

' "God is faithful," ' said Benjamin Tovel, ' " and will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

' Just in the last distressing hour
The Lord displays His saving power:
The mount of danger is the place
Where we shall see delivering grace.'

' Let's we sing, daddy,' said little Sue. The blind man's deep musical voice raised the tune, little Sue stood at his knee, and Sammy looked up from the floor, and they all sang together.

And now the tea could be made, and the milk, quickly boiled up, was poured on the bread ; and little Sue said, ' Don't it make you feel hungry, Sammy, to see how nice it do look?' and Sammy said, ' I have been hungry all day, but I don't mind waiting now. Mammy, I want to give dear old Smut his nice milk.' Smut was greatly surprised at a brimming saucer of milk, but after due consideration he lapped it all up. Poor Sharp just lifted a longing eye, but he did not speak a word ; and little Sue left some of her bread and milk in her basin and gave it to him, for she always shared her food with Sharp. And warmth, and comfort and blessing, cheered body and mind. Who could be happier that evening, or what better feast? The messenger of peace had come over the mountains of trouble, and by such blessed charity said to the poor, in brightening assurance, ' Thy God reigneth !'

Little Sue went home with her father, and they rested

in peace, in the happy knowledge that they were not bereft of their friends. Rachel and Sammy went warm and early to their pillow, little Sammy looking at his broom in the corner, and saying, 'Be not you glad, mammy, I have got my own little broom safe? Will you put it into your letter when you write to her?' When the children were in bed the widow stepped out, bought her paper and pen and a penny bottle of ink, and came home and poured out her thankful heart to her friend, and then lay down with her children; and the sleep that had fled from her trouble came back to her joy, and the morning dawned in peace on the eyes of the widow.

Now to return to Mrs. Brame. So much had passed over her mind during her visit to Ivy Lane, that, on leaving the house where Widow Garson lodged, Mrs. Brame believed that the hour must be late. She hurried back to the main streets of the town, and on to the Golden Fleece, and found it still wanted an hour of the time fixed for departing. But feeling that her work for that day was done, and being a little exhausted with the effort of mind, she sat down in the Golden Fleece parlour, and did not refuse the biscuit and wine that the landlady pressed on her as an offering of respect. Seated there alone, Mrs. Brame had time to think over all that had passed. It seemed to her, on reflection, a large sum to have given the whole of two sovereigns on an impulse like that. Her store was less by two pounds, and she had nothing in hand to show for it; a gap in her reckonings she could never fill up, her gathered store would always stand at those two sovereigns the less. These calculations were natural to one unused to give. But it had not been

by a sudden impulse only that Mrs. Brame had at length stretched forth her hands to the poor and needy. A new and heavenly principle was strengthening within her. From that hour, when with tears of deep feeling she acknowledged 'There is no good in me,'—from that hour the love of the Spirit of God had taken root and blossomed within her, and already bore this blessed fruit. For the tree of immortal life has not one season alone; it bears its fruit every month, and the leaves of that tree are for the healing of the nations. This is equally true of it, whether growing in the Paradise of God, or planted here in the renewed soul of man, the garden of the Lord, bearing the fruits of the Spirit, 'which are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.'

Mrs. Brame, therefore, was not left to sink into the questioning of her former self, for when the love of the Spirit has found life in action, the Spirit of love is always near to speak peace. And so amidst the first reaction of feeling, as she sat alone in the parlour of the Golden Fleece, she heard again, in remembrance, the low tones of the widow, saying, 'My God hath sent His angel and hath shut the lions' mouths that they have not hurt me.' Had God indeed sent her, made her His messenger? What! thought Mrs. Brame, sent me the very moment in which my hard heart was shown me? Can I believe it? Yes, you may truly believe it, for while it is written 'God resisteth the proud,' it is also written, 'He giveth grace to the humble.' You have humbled yourself under the mighty hand of God, and He has already exalted you into His special service, to be His

messenger of life and blessing to the poor of His people. Wonder not at this with unbelieving doubt, for He waiteth to be gracious, and upbraideth not.

Mrs. Brame could not share the deep maternal feelings of the poor widowed mother, yet not the less was the workhouse a lion's mouth to her. She held it to be the end of all respectable independence; and though not quite right in this feeling, yet as it was her feeling, it made the poor widow's expression a very real one to her.

Then, again, Mrs. Brame recollected how that morning she had gone to her chest in the last moment of time and taken out those two sovereigns; she could not tell why, and all so unlike her prudent ways, who never did a thing without a reason. So she came to the conclusion that it must have been as the poor woman said, God had been pleased to send her; this was a hallowed and elevating feeling, shedding assurance within and serenity without. Even though, it must be confessed, there did rise in Mrs. Brame's mind something of a secret fear lest she should be sent often on such errands as these, and her carefully gathered store be melted away. Let it not surprise any that such a feeling should be there; self will contend for the dominion it has reckoned its own, and many a battle-field must be fought before the 'more than conqueror through Him that loved us.'

But William was ready, and Black Beauty trotted home in the calm autumn afternoon with his master, and Mrs. Brame, and the two little mice. On reaching the Hall, Mrs. Brame carried up the little house and the mice within it, secret and safe under her shawl, into her own room. Tea was ready, and she hastened down to the

housekeeper's room, much in need of its welcome refreshment. Mrs. Brame now seemed to share in little Alfred's personal feeling, and wished to impart her secret to no one but Mercy. After tea she asked Mercy to step up with her; then, alone in her room, the first exhibition took place. All was well with the little mice, and they both looked more engaging than Mrs. Brame had thought it possible little mice could appear. Mercy was delighted, and not shocked at the cost, nor surprised at the extravagance. She offered to run to the nursery to see whether the children were there, and begged that she might be present when the mice made their appearance. Mercy soon returned, saying the children were there, and not the least expecting any surprise as at hand. So Mrs. Brame accompanied Mercy, whose eager step and brightening eye told almost of a childlike expectation and joy. It was a singular, yet now a natural and happy connexion, this three-fold companionship on the way to the nursery — Mrs. Brame, Mercy, and the two little mice. A little mouse had been the means of making peace, and now the elder and the younger were bearing two little mice in triumph, the unconscious token of their mutual good-will. So quickly may the greatest changes be wrought when the hidden agency is that of omnipotent love.

Mercy opened the door just as Constance was saying, 'Cox, will you tell us a story? we don't want to play.'

'You must wait a little while,' replied Betty Cox; 'and try and manage one game more. But who is coming here?'

The children looked round, and ran to meet Mrs. Brame and Mercy at the door.

Mrs. Brame walked in with a settled composure, and a small bundle cuddled up under her arm, Mercy attending on her with a face full of significant pleasure.

‘Who can guess what is here?’ said Mrs. Brame, invitingly. Mrs. Brame’s imagination had brightened up with her affections, as probably it always does, and she now had a perception of the possible use of a guess.

The children gave a jump of delight, and reached up little hands, but Mrs. Brame’s arm was above them.

‘What can it be?’ said Mrs. Cox, and she came into the group where the children were jumping in eager delight, now catching hold of Mercy, now of Mrs. Brame. But all leaps were in vain. Sally Millington stood behind holding little Maud in her arms, but no survey could avail; only little Maud, discovering nothing except Mrs. Brame, said gravely, ‘Mut, ‘Mut!’ At this Sally Millington took a dance with her, always supposing it as yet the best remedy for care.

‘Who can guess?’ again asked Mrs. Brame, in the same knowing way.

‘Brame, Brame, let me whisper,’ said Alfred, and he ran for a chair, upon which he climbed to whisper. ‘Is it my own little live mouse?’

Then Mrs. Brame unfolded some wraps and opened a little lid, with Alfred still on the chair, that he might have the first peep; then as he jumped down in his glee, she seated herself, and all gathered eagerly round. Oh, the shouts when the brown mouse and the white mouse appeared! Mrs. Brame proposed they should feed on the

table, and Mrs. Cox in a moment cleared away all her work, the cutting-out so important to finish. Little Maud, for the first time, came to climb on Brame's knee, and the little brown mouse and the white nibbled a nut on the table, then took a little run, and turned back again. Alfred's glee was extreme. 'Oh, call grandmamma! Mercy, call grandmamma!' Mercy hastened off, but Alfred could not wait, he ran out calling through the balustrade, 'Papa, mamma, come up here!' The shout was so eager, and repeated again, that before Mercy could accomplish her errand, doors opened on all sides. Mr. Clifford looked up from the library, Lady Gertrude from the drawing-room, and grandmamma came in view to answer the appeal. Little Alfred ran for a chair to set her close to the mice; then, unwilling to leave them again, he called from the table until papa, mamma, and people great and small, came hastening into the nursery, to see what the occasion might be. Mrs. Brame was well-nigh overcome at little Alfred's delight and the interest of all. And when Mr. Clifford knelt down by Alfred, and laid a nut on the open palm of his hand, and first the little brown mouse ventured on, then the white, and both sat nibbling together, shouts arose from the young voices around.

Never before in the annals of time had two little mice caused such an uproar of pleasure, nor engaged so many people in interest around them. There was no dispersing of the assembly until the two little mice had both retired to their house. Then the company departed with warm congratulations. Mercy was engaged trying some dozen probable places, as a safe resting-place for the house of the

mice ; while Mrs. Brame talked with Mrs. Cox, and, in a confidential whisper, said, ' I have found poor old Smut ! I will tell the children another day.' Alfred finally fixed on a little rest above his cot, where some friend had placed a cherub in plaster of Paris, which he now dislodged to make a rest for his two little mice.

CHAPTER VII.

THAT evening Mrs. Brame could not resist the inclination to open her chest and look at her golden store. It was less, she knew, by two sovereigns, and she had an unacknowledged wish to see whether it looked less. She opened her chest, drew out its secret drawer, there lay her sovereigns, many of them bright as when fresh from the Mint, never having known the traffic of trade or of charity. She looked on her gold. There was danger in that look, for it was a look of love for money as money, not because of the blessings it might scatter around. The question seemed still undecided whether Mrs. Brame was to be of 'the covetous,' whom, it is written, 'the Lord abhorreth;' or whether hers was to be 'the soul of the liberal,' whom God will make rich. Mrs. Brame began again to ponder on the impulse of that day which had led her to take in and give away two sovereigns in one act; to ponder on this, not thinking of the widow and the fatherless, but looking on her money. Then it was that a still small voice spoke in Mrs. Brame's heart, and said, 'Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be made rich.' Those wondrous words pleading with the worldly self in her soul, severed once and for ever the link that had bound her to money; it melted

away under the warmth of that heavenly love, and Mrs. Brame never again cared for money as money. Even now she put out her hand and took another bright sovereign from her store and placed it in her purse, that no call might find her unready; then lay down to rest in the happy consciousness that the widow and the fatherless still had a home.

That first evening when attending on her lady, the time had been occupied in talking over the mice and little Alfred's pleasure, and things naturally flowing from the comfort felt by all. But the next evening Mrs. Brame told of her visit to Ivy Lane, and of the state in which she found the poor widow and her children. Lady Gertrude listened with the deepest attention. It was the first time she had ever heard of the wants and sorrows of others from her old nurse, and this newly-awakened spring of feeling was the cause of warmest thankfulness to her.

Mrs. Brame had said nothing of what she had done, nor had she mentioned the arrival of the bailiff; she only told of the state of distress in which she had found them, and of the poor woman's dread of the workhouse; and Lady Gertrude asked anxiously—'But the workhouse! I hope they are not gone there?'

'No,' replied Mrs. Brame, 'they will not go awhile yet; for the bailiff came while I was there, and I could not stand that, so I sent him away.'

'You mean you paid the rent?' said Lady Gertrude.

'Well, he would not have gone without,' replied Mrs. Brame.

'What a mercy you went in that day! but what can be done for the future?'

‘Pay the poor widow’s rent, I suppose,’ replied Mrs. Brame; ‘I fear it will not be wanted long, her days cannot be many.’

‘Oh, Brame! you stood in the breach like an angel of comfort! How often you will think over with thankfulness the balm you must have poured into that widowed heart! I will talk with my husband and hear what he thinks can best be done.’

Mrs. Brame had not told the Lady Gertrude the words of the widow when she said, ‘My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me.’ But now her own beloved lady, the one being in all the world who had known her longest and best, who knew more than any other all her faults, and her crossness, and her hard ways, she had called her ‘an angel of comfort;’ and Mrs. Brame thought over the words—‘An angel!’ ‘My lady call me “an angel!”’ I thought she did know all the bad ways I have nursed up so long, and only bore with me because I was faithful to her. Could she indeed think God had sent me?’ And over her spirit came again the awful sweetness of the thought of being so near unto God as to be directed and sent by Him; and there rose in her soul the longing to be near Him at all times; in all her ways to acknowledge Him, that He might direct her paths.

On the following Sunday, when the text was given out at church, Mrs. Brame looked up with a sudden surprise, for the words were from Ps. cxlviii. 14, ‘A people near unto Him.’ These words would not have struck on her ear more than any others before, but she had been led to feel a little of what it really was to be near unto God, she

had longed for greater nearness—a constant nearness to Him, and this made her notice the words.

The minister unfolded his subject by showing that to be near unto God we must be made like unto Him in the spirit of our mind—the same mind must be in us that was in Christ Jesus our Lord, for how can two walk together except they be agreed? Then he went on to show what the mind was that was in Jesus Christ, His meekness and lowliness, His poverty of spirit—He humbled Himself; His love passing knowledge—in that He died for the ungodly; His will subdued in all things to God—‘Not my will, but Thine.’ As he dwelt on all these points Mrs. Brame listened, and each one seemed more unlike her than all that went before. ‘The entrance of Thy word giveth light.’ The word of God entered her heart now, and was shedding light around, showing her more and more of the evil of sin, and the alienation of her soul from God. Over many a listener there the calm words of the preacher were passing almost unheeded, but in Mrs. Brame’s soul they kindled a true repentance; grief of heart for having been in her spirit and life in opposition to Him who deserved the deepest love and ceaseless service of all. She looked on Him whom she had pierced, and mourned for Him. No one can say in true repentance, ‘I have sinned,’ until the heart is ready also to say, ‘I will arise and go to my Father.’

Early in the week Mrs. Brame paid a visit to the nursery, where she was always welcome now, and told the story of the discovery of Smut. She observed how great an interest Constance and Alfred took in the history of the poor widow and her children about to be sent from

their home by the man who had come to sell all their things; and especially in the little sweeper-boy and his broom. A short silence followed at the end of her tale; then Constance said, 'Did you really send the man away?' as wishing to be quite assured; and little Alfred asked, 'Did he mind what you said, and go quite away?'

'Yes, quite away,' replied Mrs. Brame.

'Will he never come again?' asked Constance.

'I hope not,' said Mrs. Brame: 'I don't think your papa will let him.'

'Papa said I must take care of all good women,' said Alfred; 'I will just go and ask him. Cox, may I go now?'

'And I too?' said Constance.

'May too?' said little Maud, who always called herself 'May,' and she was in her home like a fair blossom of spring.

'The nursery bell has not rung yet,' replied Cox, 'but it will not be long now.'

'I hear it!' cried Alfred, and Constance ran with him, little Maud hastening after in Sally Millington's arms.

They all descended in quick time, and the children were soon round their father.

'Papa!' said Alfred. 'Papa!' said Constance.

'One voice at a time; which should speak first, Alf?' asked their papa.

'Consy, papa; but I too very soon.'

'Well, Consy, what is it?'

'Oh, papa, Brame has been to see her old home, and she found a poor woman and two little children; and a man came to sell their things, and send them away with-

out any home, papa, because they had no father to take care of them, and Brame sent him quite away, and the poor woman was so glad, and the little boy had a little broom to sweep the street-crossing clean, and, papa, Brame said you would not let the man come again to take the poor woman's home away; will you, papa?'

'Now, what has Alfy to say?' inquired their father.

'But, papa,' pleaded Constance, 'do just tell me,—will you never let that poor woman's home be taken away?'

As the child pleaded, the thought of old Willie, and his own beloved father, and the days of his childhood, came back on Herbert Clifford's heart, and his eyes filled with the tears of tenderest recollection as he still said, 'Let me hear, before I answer, what Alfy has to say.'

'Papa, I can take care of that poor woman, and I can go and tell the man he must never go there again. I can ride there to-morrow on Snowberry, and you can go, too, papa.'

'But, Alfy, the poor woman has to pay money for her home; the man was obliged to come because he wanted the money, and when he came the poor woman had no money to give him!'

'Then, papa, I will give her my money; I don't want any money. If I give her all mine, will that be enough?'

'I am afraid not, Alfy.'

'Then, I know grandmamma will give her some, too. Will you, grandmamma? Do tell papa you will. How many pennies does she want, papa?' Alfred as yet called all coins by the one name of 'penny,' and thought the larger the coin the more value it had.

'I shall count mine,' said Alfred.

'And I too,' said Constance; 'and I will ask Cox, for I know she has a great many.'

Then there was a running off for little boxes, and a pouring out on the table, and Constance came back with delight; Cox had given all her pennies, and a big silver one, too; and grandmamma took out her purse, and gave it to Alfred to choose which piece of money he liked. Alfred rejected the gold, and fixed on a bright half-crown, as the largest in value, and the one he wished to have.

'Will that do, papa?' said Alf. 'Shall I take it all to the man, and tell him never to go there any more?'

'You had better ask mamma what she would advise.' On which the children ran to their mother, who suggested that as Brame knew the man and the poor woman, they had better drive in with her in the pony-carriage, and see what could be done.

'Shall we go to-morrow, mamma?'

'Yes, if the weather be fine.'

'May I run and tell Brame?' Alfred asked in delight; and receiving permission he ran off to his friend, while little Maud, looking up, said, "'Mut, 'Mut!'"

'What is it Maud wants?' inquired her mother; but little Maud only repeated "'Mut, 'Mut!'"

'Never mind, mamma,' said Constance; 'Maud only means Smut.'

'What is Smut?' asked her mother.

'Only a cat,' replied Constance. 'Brame had a great cat, and she called him Smut, and one day a dog came in and he ran up the chimney, and never could be heard of any more, only the other day Brame found him quite well and

alive; and this poor woman and her little children had taken care of him, and fed him. But do you know, mamma, a young lady brought a beautiful little kitten, with a little red collar on, but Brame would not have it, and the young lady almost cried.'

'Why did this young lady wish Brame to have it?'

'Because, you see, mamma, the dog came with her that frightened Brame's cat away: but it was not her dog, only it followed her for a bone; it was a poor man's dog, who was blind!'

'Then Smut is not in the chimney now?' said Mr. Clifford.


'No, papa, he is quite well, and lives with the poor woman, and he would not leave her little girl when she cried; but Smut had quite forgotten Brame, which was very ungrateful. Mamma, don't you think it was rather unkind of Brame not to take the little kitten when the young lady wanted her so much to have it?'

'I cannot tell, Consy, but I am sure, if it were at all unkind, Brame is sorry for it now; and when people are sorry for any want of kindness we should never mention it again: should we?'

'No, mamma; I am sure Brame is very kind now.'

It was soon decided that Constance and Alfred were to go into the town with Mrs. Brame the next day to visit the poor woman, and to tell her she should receive one pound a quarter, which, with her small parish allowance, would keep her and her children at home. Constance and Alfred were each to have their own little purse, with some pieces of money in, to lay out on their way in whatever Mrs. Brame thought would be best for the poor

woman and her children. All were happy in this arrangement, the children delighted; even the two little mice felt the benefit, in a little more quiet and a longer nap by day, than they had had since they quitted their four-footed friends. The children rose up with happy thoughts of their mission of love on a bright autumnal morning. They looked from their nursery window on to the soft misty uplands, and into the blue of the sky. 'Oh, Cox, we shall go! we shall go!' happy voices exclaimed. Never did pleasure to the children look greater than this visit with Brame to buy treasures in the town for the widow and her children, and secure to them the possession of the attic they called home. And it was home to them—warmed with the love of a mother, happy because her presence was there—the smile, the voice, the hand, the step of a mother! There they slept undisturbed, and when the sunshine streamed through the ivy-leaves, it called them to prayer. There they prayed to their Father in heaven, sang their soft hymn of praise, and read together of the love that created them, redeemed them, watched over them, and would one day receive them to itself for ever. It was home, for no other authority was there save the sweet word of a mother. Not the eye of workhouse inspection, only a mother's, filled with tenderness and tears. No master's step entered to order to this task or that; the mother toiled on for her children, and the impulse that strengthened into principle in the heart of each child was the dear thought of mother and home! It was this home Mrs. Brame had saved on that day; this home that little Constance and Alfred were going in to defend from the remorseless footstep of want. And such



homes are countless in these dear isles of the sea, and numbers not, as this, bereft of the husband and father. God guard them in safety, and send His own ministering children to and fro through the land to keep their hallowed ties unbroken !

The lessons were done, the early dinner over, and the pony-chaise at the door; it was no longer drawn by Snowflake and Ruby, but by a black pony of great beauty, whose name was Zarepha. Snowflake and Ruby had ended their pleasant work, and they both lay at rest under the old trees of the park. Constance and Alfred sat together in front by the groom, and Mrs. Brame in full view of the children behind. But the chief interest of the drive was now to ask questions about little Sammy and his broom, and his sister and poor widowed mother; and the little faces were always turning round in eager inquiry.

‘ Shall we see the young lady and that beautiful little kitten ? ’ asked Constance, rather doubtfully, not quite sure that it was right to remind Brame of an event of which she had spoken with self-condemnation.

‘ I am afraid not, ’ said Brame ; ‘ she is away with her father ; he is blind, and she has no mother. ’ And Mrs. Brame’s cheerful look changed to one grave, if not sad.

‘ What made her father blind ? ’ asked little Alfred.


‘ India, they say, ’ replied Mrs. Brame. ‘ It is very hot there ; and bad diseases, I suppose : but I don’t know any more. ’

‘ Do you think she has left the little kitten at home ? ’ inquired Constance.

‘ My dear, the kitten, if alive, has been a cat long

ago! But Smut will be there, and he is a beauty, I am sure.'

Mrs. Brame felt an interest in taking the children to a shop to which she gave her custom when she lived in Ivy Lane. It was not the shop where the poor widow dealt, kept by the kind woman who gave the rasher of bacon when little Sammy told her that the rent was all paid; that was a small general shop, and the one where Mrs. Brame dealt was a large one. 'Maynard, Linen-draper and Grocer,' was over the door. Zarepha drew them swiftly there, and Mr. Maynard came out, and the three important customers entered the shop. Constance and Alfred had very seldom been in a shop, and never in one like Mr. Maynard's before. On one side were all descriptions of grocery, such as coffee, sugar, and tea; at the end of the shop, bacon, butter, and cheese; and down the other long side all that linen-draperers sell, with a counter for stationery, and a small room for bonnets, and all that belongs to a milliner's department. It was a very pleasant shop to stand in, looking round, purse in hand, with all the wants of the widow and the fatherless pressing warm round the heart. Constance had a great wish to fix her choice on a print strewn with rosebuds, to make little Rachel a frock, and a little plaid pinafore for Sammy. But she was at length persuaded by Mrs. Brame, as winter was fast coming on, to lay out her money in flannel and stockings. These were not so attractive to Constance, and as she never knew what it was to feel bitterly cold, she could not understand how they could be so welcome as the rosebuds and plaid. But she took Mrs. Brame's counsel, and purchased the warm flannel and stockings, and Rachel and



little Sammy were happier all the cold winter, and their poor mother coughed less often for the warm clothing Constance gave.

Alfred wished to buy some food for Sammy, and fixed his attention on a small round Dutch cheese. Mrs. Brame indulged his wish to buy it, for she said Dutch cheese was wholesome, and then proposed tea and sugar, and, lifting Alfred into a high chair, told him he could ask the man in a white apron for half-a-pound of tea.

The man presented himself before Mrs. Brame.

‘It is Master Clifford who is come to buy to-day,’ said Mrs. Brame; and the man turned to Alfred, and said,—

‘What may I have the pleasure to serve you with, sir?’

Alfred looked at Mrs. Brame, and said,—

‘A half-penny of tea.’

‘Half-a-pound,’ whispered Mrs. Brame, but Alfred knew no difference, and the white-aproned man understood perfectly well, and little Alfred watched with great interest the ladling out of his tea into the scale lined with white paper, then its tying up in blue. Dear child! he little knew then, nor ever will in his wealth, the comfort that lies folded in a packet of tea: the one beverage in the cottage, refreshing body and mind. All the associations with it are comfort—the kettle, the tea-pot, the cup and saucer, the short rest from toil, the reviving fragrance, and warmth. Yet how often it is longed for in vain, because no Mrs. Brame has discovered the want, no Constance and Alfred made haste to supply it! Then the man in the white apron waited further commands, and

Alfred, instructed by Mrs. Brame, gave his order for sugar. After buying all this, to Alfred's surprise, three pennies were returned to him by the white-aproned man; he looked up at Mrs. Brame in doubt and suspense, but Mrs. Brame told him he might put them in his purse. As they were leaving the shop Constance looked again at the pretty prints in display, saying,—

‘I do wish so I had just one little frock!’

‘Do you, dear?’ said Mrs. Brame, and she turned again to the counter and helped Constance to choose, not the rosebuds on a white ground, but little stars of white on a dark lilac print. Mrs. Brame paid for this, and Constance, quite happy, left Mrs. Brame to be the bearer of the clothing for warmth, and clasped up in her arms the little star-bestrewn frock. So at length they left the shop laden with comfort, and Zarepha drew them quickly to the midst of Ivy Lane, and each carrying a parcel they went in at the door.

The sight of a pony-carriage at that door was unusual, the visitors attracted attention especially within; one lodger and another looked out after them as they climbed the long staircase. When it was seen to be Mrs. Brame, it was guessed where they were going, for it had been soon discovered in the house that Mrs. Brame had paid the poor widow's rent, and one and another looked out in curiosity and interest. The lodgers had been good to the widow and her children; if it had not been for them the last parting would have been over before Mrs. Brame had revisited the house. The poor are good to the poor, and will generously help those in greater need than themselves. How often in their ready help in trouble may be found the

answer to our Lord's touching inquiry, 'Which thinkest thou was neighbour to him?' And they lend their aid with tired limbs, weary with the toil of the day, and give of their daily bread when they know not how it may come on the morrow. Well may we bind the injunction of our Lord on our hearts, 'Go thou and do likewise.'

It was only the poor woman who lodged in the room that had been Mrs. Brame's, who looked out with a feeling of jealous displeasure. 'There,' she said to herself, 'all the charity goes up to the attic, because the widow's children have nursed up the cat! such favour and fuss about cats I never heard before.' But Mrs. Brame was climbing the steep staircase without one thought of Smut; for God's children had taken the place of God's creatures in her heart. But there was no one to tell the poor woman her mistake, for no one knew her thoughts—only He who understandeth our thought afar off; and He was not angry, but pitied the poor woman, for she had been trained up in hard thoughts from a child, and no one had taught her to know, by happy experience, the love that seeketh not its own.

Mrs. Brame, Constance, and Alfred, at length climbed to the door. Mrs. Brame knocked, and a child came to open.

'Mother, 'tis the lady come again!' said Rachel, turning back to her mother in her glad surprise, without asking Mrs. Brame in. But Mrs. Brame entered with the children beside her. The widow rose from the chair, and her pale face flushed with deep feeling. The room looked neat as before, but a light of life and comfort was over it. A little fire burned in the grate, the tea was set on the

table, though not yet four o'clock, and the kettle sang its low song, the cadence of comfort that often cheers up the lonely. The widow's chair was near the table, and she held in her hand the shirt she was making for sale at a shop. Rachel, too, was making a shirt, and a little rough stool by the fire looked as if waiting for Sammy. Smut sat before the fender with eyes shut, as if thinking, but not less aware of all passing around. 'There is Smut, Alfy!' whispered Constance, and the widow had set the only other chair in the room for Mrs. Brame, and Rachel the stools for Constance and Alfred.

Then followed a time whose tale cannot be told. The one pound to be given a quarter, and the first given now; the parcels opened by Constance and Alfred, who looked grave and surprised at the warm tears that fell on the treasures unfolded to that widowed mother's eyes, especially when Rachel cried too, which Rachel would not then have done if it had not been that when she saw her mother cry she always cried too. But Mrs. Brame made rather short work of the gifts. Then came the caress for Smut from Constance and Alfred; Smut did not respond to it,—not that any sharp claws appeared, but he glided away, and walked round and round Mrs. Brame, rubbing his face on her gown, as if recollection returned; and Mrs. Brame said that was just what he used to do, and she stroked him once, but she had deeper interests at heart, and Smut held no absorbing place now. Indeed Mrs. Brame could seldom think of Smut without a feeling of self-condemnation, as she remembered the years in which she wasted life on herself and on him.

There is a truth some have found it a long task to

learn, that God has given us our affections for our own welfare and the welfare of others; and if we shut them up to this or that object, neglectful of others, our hearts will grow narrower, and our life will lose thousands of blessings that it might have received itself and scattered abroad. Each new friendship or interest, if entertained aright, will increase our power of influence, and expand our affections for others; but if instead of this we allow it to absorb us, we shall find our error too late, and look back on lost and wasted feelings, that if directed aright, as God willed when He gave them, would yield blessed memories to gladden the evening of this life, and impart a deeper joy to the next. With Mrs. Brame it had not been a friend, it was her sole companion—a cat. But Mrs. Brame's heart had been opened, and its interest was ready for all. During this visit she inquired about Miss Campbell, the young lady who had proved so good a friend to the Widow Garson. The poor widow slipped her hand in her bosom, and took out a letter. She said it had only come that morning. Would Mrs. Brame please to read it? It was as follows:—

‘DEAR MRS. GARSON,—I have been shedding tears of joy over your letter. No words can tell you the comfort it gave me. I received it last evening, and the thinking of it kept me wakeful for hours. How little I thought, when I vexed so long for that dear old cat, what comfort would one day come out of that sad beginning! I had thought of you continually, and almost dreaded to hear, fearing that terrible sorrow must have come down upon you; but, as Benjamin Tovel would say, “Where is our faith?”

How thankful he must be, and little Sue, and your dear children. Give my love to them all, and tell them I shall come home soon, rejoicing. I seem to feel sure Mrs. Brame will not forget you now. I think she is one who, if once made a friend, will always prove so. I often long to see you all again. We have not much comfort here, but my dear father feels better. In thankfulness and joy I remain, yours affectionately,

‘ OLIVIA CAMPBELL.’

Mrs. Brame felt warmed by the letter ; it was to her a balm on the past to find that any kind thought of her could be entertained by the blind officer's child. But she returned the letter without any comment upon it, not quite knowing what to say. She did not make any inquiry as to Benjamin Tovel and little Sue, who were mentioned in the letter, not remembering that that was the blind basket-maker's name, and therefore not supposing they were persons in whom it concerned her to feel any interest. Then little Alfred whispered to Mrs. Brame,—

‘ Where is Sammy ?’ and Mrs. Brame asked the widow.

‘ He is not home yet,’ she replied. ‘ He can hardly be got from his crossing until he has earned a few pence. He often says “ Mammy, I am man enough to work for you ; and when I grow a big man I will earn all you want.”’ And the widow's face saddened a moment, as the thought crossed her heart that her life could not linger on earth to see Sammy a man.

‘ Is Sammy sweeping his crossing ?’ little Alfred asked again of Mrs. Brame, not having courage to ask of the widow, but she replied,—

‘Yes, my dear young sir, he is there. I wish he were home; but this being a fine day, I fear he has not earned a halfpenny, though people are very good to him, and I dare say he is staying on in hope that he may. We get our tea early, because we take but two meals a-day; and he knows we always wait for him. Shall Rachel run and tell him to make haste, and get home?’

‘I think,’ said Mrs. Brame, ‘we might drive home by his crossing, if it is not far away?’

‘No, ma’am, it’s very near; just the end of the next street, on the way to the market.’

This return by the crossing was a happy thought of Mrs. Brame’s, and with smiles and farewells the children departed. They had not driven far before they saw a place where two crossings met, and there stood a little boy with a broom in his hand. It was Sammy, the little Ministering Boy.

‘There he is!—there is little Sammy! and look, there is his broom!’ both children exclaimed.

‘Should you like to give him your pennies?’ Mrs. Brame asked of Alfred.

‘Yes,’ answered Alfred, and he pulled out his purse. ‘Now, stop, John,’ little Alfred said to the groom; ‘I want to get out’

‘What for?’ asked Mrs. Brame; ‘you can give your pennies without getting out.’

But Alfred replied,—‘No, I cannot. Sammy is not a beggar!’ And John drew up Zarepha, and Alfred walked straight over the clean crossing, and then put his three pennies into little Sammy’s hand, exactly as Mrs. Brame had told him people did when he questioned her all about

little Sammy and his broom. Alfred looked upon Sammy's as a respectable trade, to be dealt with accordingly ; then, satisfied, he climbed up into the carriage again, and Zarepha drew them quickly away. Little Sammy had been too much astonished to speak. No one had ever put a larger sum than a penny into his hand before, and when the children turned round they saw him looking after them ; then lifting his little broom, he set off running home.

‘ He is going to his mother !’ said Constance.

‘ Will my pennies make him quite happy ?’ asked Alfred of Mrs. Brame, who assured him they would. And the ministering children were soon safe in their home. And their evening was bright as their day had been, while they poured out their tales of joy to the listening love around them. And so closed that day of blessing, leaving happy memories for ever.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Mrs. Brame was returning from the town on the market-day on which she went in with William Smith, she had suddenly said, 'There is one thing now I have forgotten ; I did mean to inquire after the blind man who makes baskets for sale.'

'Did you want one of his baskets ?' inquired William. 'I could get you one next week if you tell me where he lives.'

'Oh no, thank you; it was not that I wanted any baskets, I merely meant to ask for the man : he lives, or did live, in Ivy Lane. I have seen him at work when I chanced to go by the lower end of the Lane, but it is not of the least consequence, for I know nothing of the man.'

It happened that two or three weeks after this, Mrs. Smith said one day, 'I cannot tell when we have ever been so long without any trampers selling baskets this way. I begin to wish they would come, for my market-baskets won't hold together much longer.'

'Well, now you speak of it,' said William, 'I should not wonder but what I can please you, as well as the travelling folk could. Mrs. Brame was telling me the day I drove her in, of a blind man in the town who makes baskets. I always have a fancy for the basket-work of the blind, I think it stands better than that by those who can see.'

‘That’s likely,’ said Mrs. Smith, ‘their minds are more settled to one thing at a time; but with half the folk now-a-days, the mind wanders after the eyes, and you may look long enough before you will see them do a thing well: ’tis the ruin of service, and will be of trade. Dear me, in my mother’s time look how long the things wore! and now you may reckon them as old almost when you buy them for new, setting the one wear against the other.’


‘Never mind, mother, I will see what my blind man can do.’

‘Ah, lad, ’tis no use your saying “never mind,” in that quiet way; I do mind, and I say we ought to mind, to see them do the work better who have lost the good gift of sight. What, I say, were eyes for, but to mind the work you have in hand? not to go roaming away as if they did not belong to you. I do say the blind put the seeing wholly to shame.’

‘But, mother, I could not draw my straight furrow if my eyes were dark, and you know how often you have said, If you hold your course in life, Will, as straight as your furrow, you may humbly thank God for His grace at the end.’

‘Ah, that’s a sure thing, Will. I am thankful to God that each one of my children has the blessing of sight.’

So William waited for the market-day to see what the blind man’s baskets might be. Mrs. Brame had not thought of the blind man again. It was not now the want of kind feeling in her, but she did not think much of facts that she did not actually see. The imagination is the eye of the mind, it enables us when we hear of things to picture them at once. When you tell one who has a vivid



imagination, of a poor blind man making baskets for a living, they see at once the poor blind man's condition. They see him working in darkness, doing all things by touch, never cheered by one cheerful ray, never seeing how well his work looks when it is done; then selling it to some one whom he cannot see,—cannot read in their faces whether they are pleased with his work; stepping out to buy what he wants, but not seeing what he buys, and then sitting down in darkness to eat the bread he has earned. All this, imagination shows at once; but a person who has not much imagination hears of a blind basket-maker, and perhaps only thinks, like Mrs. Brame, 'A good thing for him that he has learned a trade!' And this is quite true, only this is not all the truth; the blind want our sympathy, for sympathy is one form of love. Yet we ought to remember, that if God has given us a power of imagination, it is a gift from Him, and we must answer to Him for our use of it; we must try to keep it real and true, pure and holy, not yielding to 'vain imaginations;' and it ought to make us very careful to guard the feelings of others, because, if we have imagination, we are able to understand the feelings of others, or ought to be able, far better than those who have not. We must not, therefore, think people wanting in kindness when they do not always feel as we expected they would. It was so with Mrs. Brame; she only thought of a blind man as getting his living by basket-work,—a happy thing that he could; and keeping a dog twice the size that he could possibly want, which was not to his credit.

How different the true picture of Benjamin Tovel! He had once been a prosperous man, in one of the happiest of

the cottage homes of England ; but the ravages of fever had left that home desolate. His young wife, Susan, sickened under it, and she and her baby-boy were both laid in one grave. Benjamin Tovel struggled long with the fatal disease; he recovered life, but his eyesight was gone: he could not see the dear places left vacant by the wife and the child, he could only feel all joy was darkened for him, the mirth of the land gone. His other child, little Sue, had been thought hopelessly ill, but she was spared to him awhile, though her frail little form would have warned her father, could he have looked on his child, that she was only given back for a time, not to find her home long on earth.

The dark wing of the pestilence had indeed left its shadow over Benjamin Tovel, but there is a light that no darkness can dim, and this brightened for him the gloom of earth's sorrows with the smile of a Father in heaven. Those who mourn for them that sleep in Jesus, sorrow not without hope, and Benjamin Tovel looked to a glad meeting again with his young wife and babe; but now for a time his pathway lay through deep affliction. He was sent to a hospital, and little Sue, just recovering from fever, to the workhouse infirmary. It was found that no aid could be rendered to the poor man's lost sight, it was hopelessly gone. So they sent him to learn with the blind the trade of basket-work, that he might have a means of support. It took months to learn his trade well, and during this time his one earthly thought was his child, little Sue. He gave the greatest care and attention in learning the trade, for he felt that each day he could lessen the time would hasten his child's release from the

workhouse, and her restoration to him. It proved a rough nursery for the little cottage girl; but we need not write of this, for when kind hearts rule in the workhouse it is a house of blessing to many.

The time came at length when Benjamin Tovel had mastered his trade. Then he left the infirmary for the blind, with a thankfulness he could not express for the knowledge he had gained there, enabling him to maintain himself and his child. He clasped little Sue again in a father's embrace; he could not see her sweet face, but he could feel her form, and the sound of her voice brought back to him the dear tones of her mother. Benjamin Tovel heard of a little shop to let at a low rent in Ivy Lane, and there he went at once and made it a home. But Benjamin Tovel and little Sue had a companion quite ready to share with them all the changes of life. This was a large dog, by name Sharp. Esau Tovel, Benjamin Tovel's father, was a shepherd on the Wiltshire Downs, and when his son took a farm-labourer's place in another county, he had charge of his master's sheep. Esau Tovel had paid his son only two visits—journeys not being so frequent in those days—the first was at his son's marriage with Susan Wellan, a wife fitted to make and keep a husband's home happy; and the second visit was when little Sue was two years old. On this second visit he brought with him a young dog, the descendant of one who had long been his own faithful companion; and pleased at seeing the friendship quickly made between it and little Sue, her grandfather said it must be called little Sue's dog. The dog's name was Sharp. Esau Tovel did not long survive this second visit, and

the affections of the cottage family gathered strongly round the dog. Sharp was not of the breed of shepherds' dogs, but gifted with that peculiar sagacity that made him easily trained to the work.

The sagacity of the dog soon became known in the neighbourhood; many offers of a high price were made, but Benjamin Tovel always said, 'The dog is my little Sue's, my old father's gift to her; he brought him up from his birth, and as long as I have bread to give my wife and children, and a shelter to cover them, I will not sell him.'

But the time came when neither bread nor shelter remained; houseless, weakly, and blind, with his only child in the workhouse, Benjamin Tovel might have felt compelled to sell the dog, though it would have been to him like the poor man compelled to part with the one little ewe lamb which he had nourished up, which grew up together with him and his children, which did eat of his meat and drank of his cup, and was to him as a daughter. But it was in this hour of his need that his master came to him, and said, 'Now, Ben, don't be vexing any way about the dog, I will make him a home while you are without one. If they can help your sight, why you may keep my sheep again; and if not, you may be as glad of him in other ways then. So I will see to his safety, and there will be time enough to settle what is best in the end!' This was truest charity, of more worth than silver or gold. It helped to revive the sick man; he well knew his master's favour for the dog, that he would have given much to possess him, yet he said not a word of buying him then. For he was a man of generous nature, he

knew his poor shepherd could not easily stand out then against selling the dog; so he waited until Benjamin Tovel should be, as it were, a free man again, able to keep or part with the dog without constraint: or, at all events, he waited to see if this might yet be. The time did come when Benjamin Tovel could again keep a home, small and poor though it was, and he more than ever wanted his faithful dog, as a guard and a guide.

Time had passed on, little Sue was just seven years old, but so small and slight she was always called 'little Sue.' The father, the child, and the dog, all dwelt together in the shop and the one little back room behind. They were all poorly fed, looking thin and rather ragged; Sharp's coat could not be expected to look better than his master's, and he was well content with his hard fare, while shared with his master and little Sue. All day Sharp kept guard in the shop; he knew each basket and sieve, and all the materials of the trade. When a basket was finished, Sharp noted it well, and took it under his special protection. The baskets came in exchange for the sheep, and if they afforded less variety and interest they gave him less trouble. But Sharp did not think about any relative merits; he would guard to the last whatever was his master's and little Sue's. Sharp was so gentle with children, that the poor town children all round were pleased to run off with a bone or a bit for the dog; and if it had not been for this general favour it is difficult to know how he could have been fed. Little Sue was the object of his most faithful regard. Often when the small fire was out, and the little child felt the cold, she would lie down by Sharp, with her arms round his neck, her little

fair head on his black shaggy side, and the dog would not move until the sleeping child woke.

Little Sue's life was a happy one, for, poor and young as she was, she was still a ministering child, doing all that she could to cheer and comfort her blind father, and never complaining of hunger or cold. She had a dim memory of a rough workhouse nursery, but the past faded away in the peace of the present; and bodily hardship is not the worst evil to which a child may be exposed. She was now with her father, and the nest of her little home was lined with the down of his tender affection.

It was near these poor people Mrs. Brame had lived for a year before she left for the Hall. It was true she seldom passed by that way, but there are some who seem to have a secret sympathy with sorrow; they are sure to discover it, and pour balm on its wounds. We may wonder how this can be, with no one to direct them, or point out the sufferers, or tell where they dwell; but perhaps if we saw in secret we should find that they asked, like one of old in his blindness, 'Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do?' and then, led by His Spirit, they found their way to the poor and the suffering, whom, but for guidance from above, they would have passed by unknowing, and therefore unheeding. Widow Garson had been as the good Samaritan of old to the blind man and his child. In the midst of her weary toil she had thought of them, sat up later at night to patch the child's little garments, or spared an hour by day to keep the little place cleanly and neat. She also trained little Sue in all the handy ways of a woman. In this way it may be said that the widow's worn fingers, while toiling for her

own children's bread, wore, though unnoticed on earth, the jewel of charity. How resplendent will that gem shine on many a finger that was labour-worn here, when, at the manifestation of the sons of God, the Father shall say, 'Put a ring on his hand!'

There was now no night-work for the widow. When the evening shadows fell she put her children to bed, took her Bible in peace, and drank deep of the sacred stream; believing she entered into rest, that rest of the Spirit which our Saviour has promised to all who come unto Him. Then she lay down on her pillow, not always to sleep, but she lay there in peace, heard her slumbering children breathe softly, and thought of her bright ones in heaven, husband and child gone before, and the short distance between them, for she knew that her steps were approaching the home of the blessed. She thought of the goodness and mercy that had followed her all her life long, and the much tribulation through which her Redeemer had told her beforehand that she must enter the kingdom. It was all over now; trouble seemed to have quite ceased for her, her last wish had been more than granted; she had only desired that she might be strengthened for the struggle to keep on that small room. Instead of this, all was now done for her; no dread now of rent, no hunger for food, no shiver by a hearth on which no flame could be lit, and the children had bread enough, and to spare. How often now it was the joy of that widowed heart to see little Sue share her children's bread and milk, to see those blue eyes gather light, and a bloom on the little white face as she sat and smiled on their warm hearth by Sammy. This luxury of doing good had been given to

the widow by those who had supplied, with no niggard hand, her need. And Rachel was often sent with a little teapot of tea to the home of the blind man when his own scanty firing was out.

And now that Rachel had a new frock, she thought at once of little Sue, saying, 'Oh, mother, shall we make up my oldest frock into one for little Sue?' And the widow answered, 'Yes, I was just thinking the same!' Oh fear not, widowed mother, to leave your helpless children alone. There is One who is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love that you have showed for His Name's sake. As you have cared for the motherless, so shall others care for your children if you be called to leave them below!

When Benjamin Tovel had by hard toil overstocked for a time his sale for the town, then it was his custom to shut up his small dwelling, pack up the baskets he could carry, with a hand free for Sue, and, with Sharp as his guide and their protector, set out for a short selling tour through the villages round. The time had now come for one of these rounds, the last that could be taken before winter set in. Great hopes rested on it, in respect of paying the rent and helping out a little, if possible, their small winter store. How much may sometimes depend on the sale of a basket! After a just calculation of materials, time, and strength, Benjamin Tovel fixed the cost of each basket while he sat working at home; but when on the road hard bargains were too often driven with him, and he sold at a far lower price, afraid not to exchange the labour of days for some value in money at last. On the whole, it was perhaps easier dealing with

the poor than the rich. People to whom the purchase-money was no object would beat down the cost; while the poor woman at her cottage door would examine the work well, and ponder long on the purchase, but if she bought she would pay down the honest price.

Sue's new little frock, made out of Rachel's oldest, and therefore only new in its relation to Sue, was to be left folded up at home, ready for Sundays, and her own little old frock was once more mended up for the journey by the hands of the widow. How many there are in this happy age, clothed in fine linen and purple, and yet not unmindful of the wants of the poor, and gladly would they send little garments ready-made to children such as Rachel and Sue, could they know the name of the town and the number on their door! But there is One who knows all the children of poverty, knows the dwelling-place of each, and the depth of their need; let us ask of Him, their Father in heaven, and He will lead and guide us in all He would have us do.

It was the market-day before starting for this last journey of the year. Benjamin Tovel never set out until after the market-day, as that day was sure to be the best in the week. Little Sue forgot all her troubles in the journeys before, and was ready, with bright spirits, to set out on this, telling Sharp many times they were going to-morrow, and must be sure to be ready to set out with the day. There was one trouble rested on the thoughts of the blind man,—little Sue's feet were poorly shod for the roadside; her little shoes were an old pair of Rachel's; they would be sure to give way when they trod in rough ways. The thought of this, too, had troubled the widow;

she longed to shoe little Sue from her own gathered store, but hardly knew, as it had been given her for another object, whether this would be right. But is it not written, 'He understandeth our thought afar off?' And the power is His to do what we cannot; and He who sustaineth the wing of the sparrow, careth for the feet of the pilgrim children of earth. The one resting-place for all care is the heart of our God.

On this market-day, to make sure of his time, William walked down the first thing to Ivy Lane, as he always did his errands before the corn-market opened, that he might be ready to start for home as soon as it was over. William walked the length of Ivy Lane, and began to fear the basket-maker must have moved his place of trade; but at length, at the end of the lane, he saw one basket hung out, as if by way of a sign, and on reaching the corner, the open shop was before him. In the shop sat Benjamin Tovel, twisting willow withes, little Sue sorting them for her blind father's hand, and Sharp on the floor at her feet. William stood still a moment to look on that touching living picture before him. No one noticed his standing, people often did so to inspect the baskets piled ready for sale. Sharp lifted an eye, but looked down again, as seeing at a glance that his watch was not needed. On the face of the blind man rested the sunbeam of peace; it lay there so calmly as though no storms of earth could ever dispel or darken that soft gleam again. We see this sunbeam sometimes on the face of earth's sojourners, when they have passed through fierce tempests of this world's tribulation, and become familiar with the presence of Him who walks on the waves, and cheers His disciples with the

assurance, 'It is I, be not afraid.' This sunbeam of faith is a token from God, like the rainbow when storms have parted. And as the rainbow assures us no storms can drown this earth again, so that sunbeam of faith compels all who look upon it to believe that no future trials can sink those to whom that token is given.

William looked on the face of the blind man and remembered old Willy; he saw again the same expression of peace that he remembered years ago on that now buried face, and the thoughts it awoke so filled his attention, that he was not conscious he had stood longer at the window than a mere inspector of baskets was likely to stand. He was recalled from his musings by a curtsy from little Sue.

'Will you please buy a basket, sir? Will you please look at one?'

William walked in and asked, 'Have you some good for market use?'

The blind man answered, 'Yes, sir; it is strong work I make mostly, for they sell the best.'

Little Sue had dropped her willow withes, and was pulling out one and another of the baskets ready-made that stood in a corner. William felt a fear of disappointing the father and child, who had already won his interest, so he said at once,—

'I must not buy, unless the baskets are just the right thing; they are for my mother, and she is not pleased if I take her home anything that does not suit her well!'

'I think some of those will, sir; or if I might make one to any order you would be pleased to give, I should not be

afraid of undertaking to please. After a week or ten days we shall be back here again.'

'Do you not live here, then?' inquired William.

'Yes, sir; but I am going my rounds, to sell a few baskets before the winter sets in.'

'And is this little child going to travel the roads with you?' William asked, in a tone of compassion, as he looked on the child.

'Yes, sir, I never leave her. We were parted once, but I hope never again, until God calls one home. I could not make my way without her, nor do anything else so far as I know. She is like the sunlight to me in my blindness.'

'Don't you get very tired?' William asked, as he looked at the delicate form of the fair little child. But her father answered for her,—

'Then we sit down, sir, and rest.' And the voice of the blind man trembled as he spoke; the subject seemed to awaken in him a fear lest any thought should be breathed that should make it a question whether he could take little Sue; for she was truly a ministering child to her father, the spring of all labour, the rest of all toil, the fragrance and beauty of this world to him.

William saw quickly that the subject had troubled the blind man, and he said at once,—

'Well, these baskets,—let me see.' And he looked with little Sue at the store she was standing by, and chose out two strong ones, of a large, useful size, saying, 'I should not wonder if I am sent here again when these baskets are done for.'

'Before then, I hope, sir;' said the blind man, in his

cheerful tone again; 'for if I judge my work fairly, that would be a long day.'

'Well I will look in again before that "long day,"' said William, 'if all things go well with me;' and he put the price of the baskets into the hand of the blind man. Then he looked again on little Sue; there was something in the simple sweetness of the child, the soft, trustful expression in her eyes, that might interest any one with a ready capability of feeling; and William thought as he looked at her that she wanted the tender care of some sheltering home, not the rough life of a poor roadside wayfarer. He was just going to ask if the little child had mother, but he silenced himself, as fearing she had not, and thinking the question might trouble the blind man again. And seeing the child's feet so poorly shod for travelling, he said in his kind, cheerful tone,—

'Those are not your best shoes, are they, my little maid?'

'They did once be the best, when Rachel gave them,' said little Sue, looking down at her feet.

'Are you going your travels in these poor little shoes?' William asked again.


'We always go in we shoes,' said the child, not quite understanding the drift of the question. And we should perhaps mention here that little Sue used on all occasions, and almost for all purposes, the personal pronoun 'We.' It stood in the place of all others with her, and had a most touching significance, as if she felt her young life so linked with her blind father that they had but one personalty, and sometimes but one possession, alike expressed by the single word 'we.'

‘I know, sir,’ said the blind man, now replying himself: ‘I know the shoes are but old, they have done well for her here at home, when she does not travel far; it’s been a burden on my mind how to get her shod for the journey, but the two baskets you have bought will set her off in new boots. I never have a burden lie on my mind but it is sure to be lifted off before the time comes that I have to rise up and carry it; and thanks to your custom, sir, we shall start cheery now.’

Little Sue looked at her father, then at William, and not understanding the conversation she looked down at Sharp; and encouraged to freedom by William’s kind tone, she said in her artless way, ‘Sharp goes with we,’ and put her arms round his neck, and Sharp’s tail rapped the floor in a gentle response. Whether little Sue feared, as a question had been made about her shoes going with her, that the next question would be about Sharp, cannot quite be told; but William fully appreciated the presence of the dog. There was something in the little child’s winning ways, something too in the circumstances of her poor little feet, that took him back to the childhood of Mercy. William’s deep love for Mercy had not absorbed his affections, but only opened them more freshly in all the blessed charities of life; and turning to the blind man, he said,—

‘You must let me cover those poor little feet. Would she like to come with me across the road there, to the shoemaker’s shop?’

‘I am sure, sir, you are sent here to make rough places smooth,’ said the blind man. ‘Sue, you will like to go with this gentleman; he is so good to you, he is going to



put new boots on your feet. You will be thankful, I am sure.'

Little Sue dropped a curtsey, but looked down; it was plain that her inclination to go with William to the shop was, to say the least, doubtful.

'Never mind,' said William, 'I know about little feet. Let me measure the length. There, not of these old shoes, they are too long by half, but of this little foot. It won't take much leather to shoe it.' Then stepping round the corner, half way down the street, he bought a pair of little boots, and soon returned with them. 'Now let me see what a good guess I have made,' said William.

Benjamin Tovel had left his work in the interest of the event, and now calling little Sue to him, he pulled on one little boot, then the other, felt them all over, and said 'Never fit could be better.' William smiled at the child, who looked up in surprise, then down at her new boots, and sliding from her father's knee she first made her lowest curtsey, as expressive of all she felt as a curtsey could be, then stooping a little drew up her pinafore to admire her new boots the better. Sharp was not slow to discover that little Sue had on something new. He stretched out his head and smelt the little boots, then appeared satisfied; and in this state of general interest and possession William said 'Good-day,' and departed.

CHAPTER IX.

LITTLE Sue stood before her blind father, still admiring her boots; at last she exclaimed, 'Oh, daddy, they be beauties! Must we lay them up with the new frock Rachel made?'

'No, little one: wear them as the gentleman said. How nicely you will trot along in that soft leather, to be sure! What a kind gentleman he was to look after the feet of my little one! What can we do for him, Sue?'

'Ask God to bless him,' she answered softly.

'And He will bless him; for you mind, Sue, where it is written, "Blessed is he that considereth the poor." How he did think of your poor little feet, to be sure!'

'Let's we just run, daddy, and show Sammy and Mammy Garson. Won't they say they be beauties?'

'So we will. New shoes should always carry good news the first errand they have on the road. But you can just run there alone first, if you must be in a hurry, for market-folks may be in and I must bide in the way.'

Little Sue could not be patient with such news to tell and such boots to show; so, looking out down the Lane, then back at her father, and Sharp, who watched the steps he might not follow (for he did not leave his blind master) she ran off at her best speed to tell Widow Garson.

It was market-day to Sammy, and he was not home:

he was seldom home on market-days until evening drew on. But the mother and Rachel were sitting at work, when a little stamp on the stairs made Rachel look up ; then a thump on the door, which Sue could not open.

‘ Is that little Sue ? ’ said the widow, and the footfall rang through her heart, for the old shoes could have made no such sound on the stairs. Rachel opened the door and the child stood before them, and looking down at her feet exclaimed, ‘ Oh, Mammy Garson, see what beauties these two new boots be ! There was such a good gentleman gave them to we. ’

Mammy Garson did rejoice, and took the child on her knee ; and there was admiration of each boot, a taking off and putting on, and the story told in little Sue’s own peculiar way. But she was not satisfied, because Sammy was not there.

‘ Let’s we go, Rachel, we won’t be gone long, and show them to Sammy. Will you, Mammy Garson ? ’

‘ No, wait till he comes ; the time won’t be long, now. You run home and tell your father I’ll keep you to tea ; and tell him I’ll bring him in a cup, for I know he is busy, and he can keep on till I bring him you and his tea. ’

‘ Mammy Garsen, if Sammy comes home will you tell him you did hear two new boots that did creak on the stair ? ’

Then back ran little Sue, but on reaching her home she found a new pleasure awaiting her there. A boy had just left a parcel, and the blind basket-maker was untying the string. The child ran to his knee, and eagerly helped in unfolding the paper. It was the very first time in her

life that the mystery of a parcel had brightened the eyes of little Sue. And now on unfolding were found two warm pairs of new socks—red worsted socks: they must be meant for her, and who could have sent them? No one but the kind gentleman who bought her the boots. Then off came the boots again, and the red socks were drawn on; the boots came quite easily over them, and the happy little feet were complete. They ran off again, in their speed and their warmth, to bear the fresh news to Mammy Garson's home. 'I am sure it seems,' said Mammy Garson, 'as if good angels were about. I never knew such things as happen now, all the days of my life.'

Benjamin Tovel's guess was right: it was William who had completed the clothing of the little feet. He had seen the tiny white feet through the half foot of the socks that were drawn on without covering them, and he had said to himself as he walked away, 'It is no use doing things by half; the child's new boots will make her feet sore in travelling, if they be not clothed in worsted beneath.' Then he remembered the days long past by, when he first shared the ministering love of his little sister Rose; that snowy day, when he found her in grief for her pins, because she wanted to knit Johnny Lambert some socks, to keep his poor little feet from chilblains in the cold. And how could he do less than care for the feet of this poor little child, who stood in such need? Well the young farmer knew, from constant treading the land, what best helped feet that must walk some miles a-day. Nothing was like worsted for feet shut up in boots, which wet roads and long travelling might make stiff and hard. So


he had stepped into a shop and sent the socks back, and now stood in the market with his first samples of corn.

Let none look round and question where such as William may dwell, as if they doubted because they themselves know not such men. In many a happy English village, not in William's alone, amongst the agriculturists, such men may be found. In many a village the heart of warmest compassions has its home in a farm. Men of business and toil, men on whom the world presses hard as on others, yet men of the kindest mould, most keenly alive to the wants of the poor, and the best means to relieve them. God bless them, and multiply them a thousand-fold, how many soever they be, and preserve the warm glow of their charity, hidden now from the observation of this world, 'to be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Benjamin Tovel rose betimes the next day. Little Sue was still sleeping, her new boots by her pillow, and her red socks laid upon them, while her father in his blindness was making ready to go. He spread a slice of bread and butter for Sue, cut a piece ready for his own frugal meal, packed the rest of the bread and a little cheese in his pocket, then attended to all things needful at home. The shutters were not taken down, for to the blind man the day's return brought no return of light. Half the shop-door was open, and this shed a glimmer into the little back-room. Benjamin Tovel in quietness had spread his way out before Heaven, and now, strengthened in spirit, he sat down to wait the waking up of his child. Once or twice he thought to call her; then the father's pity was stirred—it might be the last night for her in a

bed until she saw her home again: so he let her sleep on, and murmured to himself the words of the 121st Psalm,—‘I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help.’ It was always his habit to repeat Holy Scripture aloud, if that could be called aloud which was only a low, expressive murmur. He said, in his blindness he missed the sweet look of the words; that no one could tell, until smitten with blindness, what it was to see no more the names of the Saviour, as they lay so fair on the page—all those blessed names of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our Father, and the Holy Spirit the Comforter. Not to be able to open the book and to look on them there, when faith failed, or hope or love had burned dim! But, he said, ‘I sometimes comfort myself up with those words of our Lord, how He said, “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed,” for I think He remembered what the blind would be feeling.’ And this is why he said, ‘I crave so the sweet sound of the words.’ For in his blindness sound filled the dark void for him; it seemed to take form and shape when he heard it, and wakened memory again, and came to him like the face of a friend. So he murmured softly the words, ‘I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help;’ and truly the mental eye of the blind man was clear and bright, and could see things unseen by the faith of many blessed with sight.

Little Sue’s constant lullaby had been her blind father’s voice as it breathed Holy Scripture. From a child he had known the Holy Scriptures, taught him first by his shepherd father on the downs, as he tended the slow wandering of his flock through the day; loved by him in his



youth when he hid it in his heart, and cleansed his way by taking heed to that holy word ; and now remembered most vividly as his closed vision excluded the distractions of sight. So the soft murmur was not likely to awake the little sleeper. But as Benjamin Tovel finished the words, with pauses in between for meditation, as one who would not drink in the living water at a draught, but lingered tasting its sweetness ; as he murmured the last words, with a love that made faith unwavering, ' The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in, from this time forth, and even for evermore,' the child awoke, and, rubbing her eyes, saw her father in the dim light.


' Oh, daddy, 'tis night ! We won't go in the dark : let's we stay till the light.'

Her father rose at her call. ' No, little one, 'tis morning. Ah, the shutter ! I forgot it : that will let in the light. There, 'tis open now, and you can see the bright dawn. We must make haste after the little birds and the flowers, if we can find any : they have all been awake long ago.'

' Here be the new boots all safe, and the red socks ; feel, daddy, how soft !' and she laid her little warm foot, clad in its red sock, in her blind father's hand. Then little Sue said her morning prayer : in this prayer she prayed for poor Sharp, that he might have food and be kept safe and well. This is not uncommon in the prayers of the poor. Their daily life is so closely associated with the creatures God has given, that they pray for their welfare with simple faith in their heavenly Father, who created and preserves the creatures for the service of man. And of all their small earthly possessions, nothing could have

half the value for the blind man and his child of their faithful dog Sharp. And He who has revealed to us His care for the sparrow, wonders not that the poor of His people, believing His word, ask His care for the animals they have in charge. So little Sue prayed for Sharp, that it would please God to take care of him, give him food, and keep him safe and well; and her blind father said a heartfelt Amen.

All was done except breakfast; the thick slices of bread lay ready, with the scanty addition that entitled them to the pleasant name of bread and butter. It was poor fare to have only this and a little mug of cold water on which to start for a journey; but the blessing that multiplied and sweetened the feast on the mountain slopes of the wilderness, made it enough and to spare: for they both shared their meal with poor Sharp. They had not finished, however, when the shop-door was opened, and in hastened Widow Garson with Rachel and Sammy, and she brought in her little teapot, with a hot cup of tea for father and child. Then she tied on Sue's little bonnet and fastened her cloak, and kissed the child and blessed her; and little Sue kissed Rachel, and gave Sammy an embrace; and Sharp's collar was on, and the cord fastened to it, and the dog standing ready. On these journeys Sharp always led his blind master along, for it would have tired out little Sue before the day was half gone. There were many, too, who would not have liked the dog loose, and they would have suspected him of some wrong practice or other. But Sharp never stole; his nature was above all the bad ways of common dogs, such as thieving and snapping. He had also had the best education any dog could



have had, so that no one need have feared him unless their own intentions were wrong. He was used to his service, and did the work well; he knew the pace that best suited his master, and would choose the easiest side of the road as they travelled along. And if he sometimes looked wistfully after little Sue in her freedom, with the freshness of the morning upon her, yet he never quitted his post, but held steadily on, as might best serve the need of the master he loved.

The blind basket-maker had done all for himself, and had fitted his baskets and other work of a like kind closely one in another, so that he might carry the greatest number, and yet when he unpacked to sell he could tell where to find each article he wanted, and how best to bind them all together again. And so they started on that breezy autumnal morning, when the air imparts vigour and the chill of winter has not yet sharpened its freshness. The widow and her children looked after them. She felt their helplessness, but it woke no misgiving within her. She had learned that lesson which only experience can teach, that our weakness is our strength, when, knowing that we are unable to do anything as of ourselves, we lean only on the help of God's heavenly grace, and find His strength is made perfect in weakness. The widow had found it so when all hope was gone, save in Him who by His Spirit has taught us to say, 'Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance, and my God.' Those strains that were sung to the harp of the monarch, and breathed in plaintive tones his experience of life, were as true to the heart and the life of the poor widow, who, thousands of years later, caught their divine harmony,

and made them her song in the house of her pilgrimage: while the blind basket-maker, in the strength of the same, trod with the firm step of trust the darkened highway.

When the travellers were out of sight Widow Garson looked round to see all things were safe, fastened up again the little shutter of the small room, locked the shop-door, took charge of the key, and returned home with Rachel and Sammy, all feeling the sadness of friends out of sight

Benjamin Tovel, used all his life long to the free air of the wolds or the fragrance of fields, felt the fresh breeze of the morning when outside the town revive him, body and mind. The scents and sounds of the country, how much they brought back to his memory, which faithfully treasured the past! He could tell in a moment when they passed by a field ploughing up; or a stack-yard, where the air gave the pleasant smell of fresh straw or sweet-scented hay; or a pasture with cows; or the heavier air where brooks were flowing full under copse-wood and hollows. His keen senses drew for him pictured scenes as he passed, filling his thankful spirit with praise to the Author and Giver of all. Little Sue had no burdens to bear; she stepped lightly along, beguiling the way to her father,—this was the work given her to do. She rejoiced in the roadside and fields: the wild blossoms were few indeed now; no blackberries or nuts hung tempting her to climb; and of all birds, only the faithful little robin trilled his kindly song to enliven the way. But little Sue sometimes sang—not in words, for she knew only the old hymns of grave measure her father sang to the psalm-tunes that his father sang

before him, in their cottage on the downs ; and though Sue liked, in solemn hours, to sing them with her father, they did not suit the light-footed dance she kept up in her new boots by the lanes, where golden foliage hung over her, and soft leaves strewed her path. So she sang out her own gladness, ' a song without words,' but full of deep meaning to the heart of a father ; and so they passed on their way.

Benjamin Tovel always travelled the same way, the only difference being that, according to circumstances, he made his round longer or shorter. He would rather trust to old customers who knew his work well, than venture on denials from those who were strangers, and in this way their road grew familiar to all. Yet it did not always answer, for the baskets wore long, and he found many a store furnished by him lasting still in good condition, not wanting new. But he still kept the same road ; it was a cheer to the blind man to reckon on the doors here and there from which would sound for him the kindly voice of a friend. He said all knew him in these parts, and if he went in strange ways some mischief might happen before he was aware. So he kept to the old.

The first night was always spent on the farm of his master ; the village where he married and first made a home. The sunshine lay warm on those memories of home, more intense for the darkness that had ever since shut them in. He knew in that village every turn of the lanes, every stile and field-path was familiar to him ; but he always took one way—to the church with its old tower, and the grave of his young wife and infant boy. This was no sorrowful visit for Sue, her father had often

told her dear tales of her mother, and had said more of the baby, his sweet looks and winning ways, than, perhaps, any father could say whose sight of things earthly had not gone when the baby went, leaving that fresh impress untouched by another. These were tales of her home, dear to the child as household records could be, and though they sat by the grave, not the less was her mother living to the faith of little Sue, something more beautiful than anything could be in this world, and her baby brother with happy smiles by her own mother's side.

Little Sue had another reason for loving this rest in the churchyard. It was when they went there and sat on the grassy sod by the side of that green grave, that her father would tell her of the tomb in the rock where they laid our Lord Jesus. First he always told her again how He died on the cross, told her of the nails and the crown of thorns, and the sharp-pointed spear; told her of the poor thief who hung on a cross by the Saviour's side, of his sorrow for his sins and his love to the dying Saviour, and that gracious Saviour's promise to him that he should be with Him that day in Paradise. At this little Sue always liked to stop and ask questions; not because she did not understand, but because she liked to hear and think about it still, and then she would say, 'Daddy, shall we one day be in Paradise too with the Lord Jesus Christ who died on the cross?' and her blind father would answer, 'Yes, little one, we may humbly trust we shall; for He is faithful who has promised, and able to keep that which we have committed to Him unto that day.'

Then came the history of the tomb in the rock, the grave the rich man had made, in which he laid our Lord,

and the two rich men who came together and brought the fine white linen, and gently wrapped the body of the Blessed Saviour with sweet spices in it, then laid Him still and safe in the rocky tomb and rolled a great stone to the door. When they reached this place little Sue's eyes would brighten, for she knew what was coming, and she would say, 'Now, daddy, let's we tell how the angels came down from the sky.' Then her father would tell her how on the third day, before the sun had risen high, the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door of the tomb and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. Then Jesus Christ arose from the dead to die no more, for death could have no more dominion over Him. Little Sue loved to hear how the Lord Jesus arose, changing death into life and grief into joy. Then she always wanted to hear all about the angels; where they sat, what they wore, and the words that they said. And how our Saviour came to Mary Magdalene when she wept by the tomb, and, blinded by her tears, she did not know her Lord. The blessed story lasted long, for little Sue well remembered it all, and liked no part left out. And the rest after the long way was sweet, and they ate their bread there, and Benjamin Tovel often had an apple in his pocket that served instead of water to drink. They carried a little tin mug, but the churchyard lay high and no water flowed there. And Benjamin Tovel never felt in haste when he sat by that grave; he gladly lingered there, and often longed and trusted that, when the days of his pilgrimage were over, he might have his resting-place there beside the wife of his youth.

So little Sue stepped lightly on her way there, thinking more of the rocky tomb, and the Saviour who rose, and the angels from heaven, than of any mortal clay that was slumbering there. And it was well that she should, for the spirit slumbers not in the grave but breathes celestial air, and rejoices in the Paradise of God.

When the rest in the churchyard and the wondrous story were ended, Benjamin Tovel rose up and stood awhile by the grave with folded hands and face upraised to heaven, as one who pleaded in prayer. Then turning to go, little Sue put her hand in her father's; but at the church porch he always lingered again. It was from there he led his bride beneath his aged father's blessing; and as he stood there he knew exactly where his cottage home lay. He could see all the land in the light of remembrance, see the thatched roof of his cottage and the little orchard behind. He forgot it was autumn, and thought of the apple-trees full of red and white blossoms as on that bridal day, and felt almost relieved that he could only see it as it was, not as now it must be with another wife and mother, and other children at play. All this passed in few moments, then, with a chiding thought on himself, he looked upward again in spirit; his true Home was there, there his best affections reposed, there his treasure lay hid. And he and his child were travelling homeward each day, and he felt it could not be far off, for its light fell upon him, and through the dark shadows of earth it beamed on his spirit with an earnest of the glory that will yet be revealed. Then he grasped the little hand of his child in his own, and, led by Sharp, they walked on in silence together.

They soon reached the farm; it lay under the hill, with its old moat around it full of water to the brim. 'Beware of the moat,' said the blind man, as he held little Sue's hand tighter, and stepped on with more caution until he felt the bridge firm under his feet. It was not now, as once, made of wood, with great chains to draw it up at alarm of a foe. It was covered over with earth and gravel, and made a strong bridge, as was right that it should be in these happy days of England's peace, when no foeman's step treads on our free island soil. Now over the bridge they stood in the green porch. 'Good day, Master Tovel,' said the cheerful voice of the mistress; 'so you are come this way again. The men are now going to sit down to their dinner, you had better step in and dine with them.' The blind man was welcomed by all, and his child and the dog. Sharp knew his quarters well, and lay down outside the circle, quite sure of being remembered when his turn might come. The men carved for the blind man, and cut kindly for little Sue a thin slice of meat; and the little girl was hungry, and pleased to see 'a real dinner.' It was the horsemen's dinner, which was not until after three o'clock, and while Benjamin Tovel was asking what yield the harvest had given, and how the sheep prospered that year on the farm, little Sue fell asleep in her chair. The men left as soon as they had finished their dinner, and Benjamin Tovel finding that the child was asleep, sat quietly on in the back-kitchen with her on his knee.

Then the mistress came in, and went to her larder and brought out a large dish of provisions for Sharp—bones, cold potatoes, and all such kind of food as is most accept-

able to a large hungry dog. Sharp was loosed from his string that he might feed outside; indeed his master did not need him in this familiar village, where every foot of ground seemed well known to him. Sharp had not feasted so well since he was last at the farm. And now the afternoon was drawing in, the sunset glowed in the west, and though the child had awaked, yet she was tired with her long walk. So her father took her hand and led her to the barn, in which he was always welcome to sleep. It was fresh filled with wheat and barley, and full of fragrance to him. There was a heap of straw from which the flail had beaten out the grain. The thrashers were just leaving; one of them was a stranger, who had come to the village and hired himself on the farm since Benjamin Tovel's last visit there. But the other man knew him well, and wishing him good-night, said, 'No call to lock up the barn-door to-night if you and the dog be going to bide here.' All had a kind word for the dog, pleased to see him again; and the men smiled on the child, and spoke so friendlily to the blind man that it was plain their rest would be that night amidst friends. Then the master came home, and when he heard his old shepherd was come, he would not sit down in the house until he had been out to greet him. Sharp sprang up to welcome him, and the master returned the caress; then said, 'The poor child is tired, no doubt. Well, you can lay her snug on some fresh straw; she will be safe enough there; and then come in for a dish of the mistress's tea, and we can talk over the harvest, and how it's fared one with another.'

So the blind man sat by his child on a truss of sweet straw, and they sang their evening hymn; then together verse

by verse they repeated the twenty-third psalm, for little Sue had said, 'Let's we say we psalm,' which always meant the twenty-third, and from the constant habit of repeating with her blind father, her infant memory was stored with the words of Holy Scripture. Then kneeling on the straw she repeated her short prayer, in which many names were remembered, and amongst them the gentleman who gave the new boots and little red socks. Gifts had been rare things to little Sue, and her heart was always a grateful one. Then taking off the boots from her tired little feet, and taking off her frock, she lay down in her red socks, wrapped in her little red cloak, and was soon fast asleep, with Sharp keeping close watch.

CHAPTER X.

By six o'clock in the still November morning the thrashers came to the barn, bared their sinewy arms, took down their flails, and the sound of the thrashing began. The blind man awoke with the first sounds of the morning ; he always slept lightly, for eyes never exercised under day's cheerful beam did not seal up in the deep slumber that sight allows man. He woke up in his darkness to all the sounds so familiar to him ; the horsemen feeding the labouring team, the cheerful cackle of hens, the hungry grunt of the pigs as they turned out from the straw, and all that told the cheer of day was reviving. He had not slept soundly, for the past day filled his memory, thoughts re-awakened would not slumber within him, and they kept him wakeful and musing upon them. He counted the night hours by the crowing of the cock, as he had often done before,— the true bird of dawn, that crowed not until midnight was past, then gave his shrill clarion note once, and twice as two o'clock came, and so on until four or five when he reckoned day was begun, and crowed then without reference to time. He cheered the night to the blind man, who could take no note of its hours when he slept in the town, except by his rested or unrested feeling ; as Ivy Lane did not wake early to welcome the day. But the blind

man did not wake up to darkness only, he woke up to His presence who was the Light of Life to him.

Little Sue heard not the heavy beat of the flail, nor the cackling of the hens as they crowded the barn-doors to welcome the thrashers, nor yet the lowing of the cows as they trooped in slowly at six to the milking, nor all the early stir of cheerful life under which her father sat musing in a sense of enjoyment. The child was still sleeping when the master looked in saying, 'Well, how have you rested? what, the poor child asleep still! Don't be hurrying away if you like to stay over to-day; you can dine with the servants, and sleep again in the barn. You can have some milk for your breakfast if the child goes to the mistress.'

Benjamin Tovel was well content to spend another day in the village, and little Sue when she woke was delighted. But before she went out of the barn she hastened to say to her father, 'Let's say we Morning Prayer,' which meant her own brief petitions, and she knelt down in a corner, away from the centre where the men beat out the grain. But the thrasher lately come, the one who was a stranger, saw the little child at prayer, and stopped resting on his flail, and as she rose up from her prayer, he wiped a tear from his eye; but he said not a word, and fell to his thrashing again. Little Sue knew not that any eye saw her pray, but to her it was as natural as the daily bread that she ate; and her father in his blindness saw not what passed around. The thrasher had been taught to pray when a child, he had knelt then as he saw little Sue kneeling now; but it had been long a forgotten service to him, for it is only the Holy Spirit who can truly teach us to pray. He shows us our sinfulness, and shows us our

Saviour, and when the sinner and the Saviour have met, then prayer is as natural and necessary to us as the food that we eat and the air that we breathe. On this morning, the sight of the little child turning first as she did to her Father in heaven, touched the heart of the thrasher in the barn; he felt his spirit softened and his own thoughts turned to God. He longed to feel like that little child, and, though he remembered not the Scripture, yet it was fulfilling in him, as our Saviour has said, 'Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye can in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.'

It is often by means the most simple and gentle that the Holy Spirit of God draws the wanderer back to his heavenly Father in repentance and prayer. The thrasher remembered the parable of the Prodigal Son, almost the only passage of Holy Scripture that he did remember, and who that had once heard it could ever forget that! It seems to be left on record, the most touching truth ever written in words, that it may lay hold of the affections, may never be forgotten, and may at length lead the wandering sinner to the heart of his Saviour, the lost child to the forgiving embrace of his Father. And even now, as the thrasher thought of the little girl at prayer, he said in his heart, 'I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him, Father, I have sinned.'

When little Sue was dressed in her new boots and her frock, she went with her father to wash her face and hands at the pump. This was a morning luxury, when the pure stream flowed freely, laving hands and face until her cheeks glowed rosy red. They had no water laid on to their little house in the town, and, obliged to have it all from a

running tap in the lane, brought home in a pail or pitcher, it was not like this; and little Sue stood before the mistress with her fair clustering curls all clinging wet round her head, her little frock dripping, but her face bright as the morning.

'There, stand and dry by that fire while I crumb you some bread,' said the mistress; then breaking bread to fill a basin she poured in the milk, saying, 'Carry that to your father; take care how you go, and come back for your own.'

Little Sue had never carried a full basin before. She held it tight with both hands as she stepped across the farm-yard, but the poor little feet were not used to the straw, the new boots, still slippery, glided from under her, and she fell flat on the ground, with milk and bread strewn around. She gave a cry of distress; it went through her blind father's heart, for he knew not the cause, but rose to make his slow, uncertain way to her. The thrashers looked out; the one who had felt little Sue's morning prayer laid down his flail and hastened to her: the other said to her father, 'There's no great harm done, only the child has spilled the milk; she will soon be all right again.' Sharp ran out at the cry, and now stood beside her, not offering to touch the bread and milk that lay strewn around. Poor little Sue held up her pinafore crying, and Sharp laid his nose on her little bare arm. 'Come now, cheer up!' said the man, 'or the hens will get all, and poor Sharp lose his turn. See, he won't eat while you cry.' Little Sue looked down at this, and the man picked up some bits of the bread and gave them to the dog, who, encouraged by seeing the face of the child, began to lick up the remainder as fast as

he could. The thrasher then took little Sue in one hand and the empty basin in the other, back to the house.

'Here's a bad job been and happened; the poor babe couldn't hold her feet, and fell on the straw.'

Poor little Sue's face of trouble, afraid to look up, softened all hard reproving.

'You must learn to keep your feet if you mean to be useful,' said the mistress, as she took the empty basin from the hand of the thrasher.

'I'll just wait and carry it, and then it will be safe,' said the man, and the good mistress filled up two basins, giving them in charge to the thrasher, who carried them with due caution, and little Sue stepped safely after him. Sharp had licked up the spilt breakfast, without snapping at the hens who hastened round him to help, though it was quite evident to all that those plump barn-door fowls did not want bread and milk, and might, if only in compassion, have left it to the visitor, whose lean sides told of hunger. Sharp now followed little Sue back to the barn.

After breakfast in the barn the same thrasher said kindly, 'Don't trouble about the basins, I'll hand them in to the mistress.' And then, seeing Benjamin Tovel about to turn out with his baskets for the day, he said, 'Be you coming back here again for the night?'

'Yes, I think so, as far as I know,' said Benjamin Tovel.

'Perhaps you and the child wouldn't be against taking a bit of supper with me? I shall be home between five and six, but if you get round before I'll mind the wife to be ready, and I'll see you back to the barn afore it be late.'

'Thank you kindly; we'll come then, I am sure,' said

Benjamin Tovel: 'which way does your cottage lie?'

'Why, just ask in the street for Lockwood, and they will show you the turn; then our cottage lies the last down Nightingale Lane, hard by the copsewood—the one with the porch: you can't mistake it if you know these parts.'

A shudder passed through the frame of the blind man; he was silent a moment—there was strength for him in silence; then he answered, 'I remember it well; I will come.'

It was the blind man's own home, filled with memories of the past. He had never thought to cross that threshold again, he had felt for a moment as if he could not venture there; but used as he was with a child's earnest trust to follow the guidance that came day by day, and having said he would go before he knew where, he would not now refuse the wish, because of what it might cost himself.

The day passed in many visits to houses far and near. He had good success in his sale of baskets, his load began to lighten. In many a cottage home he found a kindly welcome, and had no need to return to his master's for dinner. The child, too, and the dog, were well remembered by many, and the day passed amidst greetings and kind inquiries and converse. To some the blind man was a messenger of comfort, for he knew how to speak a word in season to them that were weary. The parish was a very large one, and Benjamin Tovel took only the side that lay round his master's farm; intending to return home across the other end, which lay some miles from this, and further from the town.

And now the evening drew on, and he must make for

the cottage down Nightingale Lane. He would not tell the child—not, at least, until they were home. And the visit would be the easier to him if none around him knew what he felt.

‘We must go now to sup with that kind friend of yours,’ said Benjamin Tovel to his child.

‘Will we know the way, daddy?’

‘Yes, little one, daddy’s feet know this way by the feel of the ground;’ and the father thought how in that cottage, seven years before, the little voice prattling beside him awoke the joy of a first-born.

They reached Nightingale Lane, and Benjamin Tovel murmured forth the words again, ‘I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help!’ He opened the wicket-gate, trod the garden path, and stood by the porch. He perceived the fragrance of the last blossoms of climbing plants his hand had planted and trained, and the feeling came over him again of the door of his home. Lockwood, the thrasher, came out to welcome them, and a friendly-speaking woman received them within. The woman had much to say, though when its meaning was weighed it all came to but little. She was one of those good-natured women who make a habit of talking, of the sound of whose voice others often get weary; it is borne with as the whirl of a factory-wheel would be by those compelled to hear it, and they cease to give heed to the unimportant meaning. It was plain that the good-natured woman expected no one to talk but herself. Her husband the thrasher was silent, as if by habit; and Benjamin Tovel felt almost relieved that to him the dwelling no longer seemed the same, as when the pleasant words and

gentle silence of Susan, his own wife, made the evenings music for him.

After supper the woman cleared away, and went to wash up her tea-things in the little back-kitchen and put her children to bed, and the thrasher was left alone with Benjamin Tovel and little Sue.

'Tis a heavy affliction you have to bear to be blind,' said the thrasher.

'Tis a loss,' replied the blind man, 'and makes you seem helpless here. But if the good God do but show us the pathway of life, and lift up the light of His countenance upon us, there is no darkness of nature can baffle that light.'

'I believe it,' said Lockwood. 'Do you think that light ever comes unawares upon any?'

Benjamin Tovel replied, 'Yes, often; no doubt, those who thought only of this world find a light shining upon them, minding them of a better. 'Tis a beam of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God; but then they must follow on as it leads them, or it will be darkness again.'

'Can that be proven from the Bible?' asked Lockwood. 'I have a Bible here, and so has my wife, but it's not much that we know of the comfort that lies in them.'

'I can't help you to places,' said Benjamin Tovel, 'for I lose all my count of the chapters and numbers. But there is a text that says—I think it is in Isaiah the Prophet—"Before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear."'

'Well, those be words! I am sure,' said the thrasher, 'it can't come down plainer than that. Do you call to mind the Prodigal Son?'

‘Yes,’ answered Benjamin Tovel; ‘I love the sound of each word of it as I once loved the sight of them.’

‘I could read it,’ said Lockwood, ‘if I knew where to light on it.’

‘I can tell you that,’ said Benjamin Tovel; ‘it is the 15th of St. Luke.’

‘I wish my wife were here,’ said Lockwood, ‘that’s to say if she would listen; she is such a woman for the talk all herself, that when you do speak she scarce seems to hear. I often say, if I had my way with the young I would teach them to listen, then when they came of an age they would know what it meant. ’Tis so comfortable-like when you come upon one who can attend on the few words you may have to say.’

‘Well,’ said Benjamin Tovel, ‘we can always find One above ready to listen. There are many words in the Bible that mark that out clear.’

‘Oh, Master Tovel,’ said the thrasher, ‘when you are speaking to me I almost feel as if I could part with the light of this world to get that of a better! I take it you followed on after this thing from a child?’

‘The poor prodigal did not,’ the blind man replied.

‘Ah, there it is again!’ said the thrasher. ‘If you don’t strike out comfort from my hard heart as the steel do from the flint! Well, as I said, I will read it. It doesn’t seem to lie at the fore part, so I had best read the whole chapter, I think. I’ll just call my wife. Maybe she’ll take more notice, you being a stranger. Sally, you come and listen. We have got some good discourse here.’ So the wife wiped her wet hands and came in and sat down, and he read the 15th chapter of the Gospel of

St. Luke. The blind man was soon so lost in its infinite sweetness that he forgot all the past, forgot all these dim surroundings of home, and felt as in the immediate light of his Saviour, wrapped in the unutterable joy that Divine Presence brings.

‘There,’ said Lockwood the thrasher, ‘I don’t know, I am sure, but I would glad enough be the prodigal to get such a welcome home.’ The wife was going to give a reproof upon this, but her husband took courage and said, ‘Now, Sally, you hold your talk back, and just listen a bit, or you’ll be none the better, and hinder those that would!’

‘As I take it,’ said Benjamin Tovel, ‘our blessed Saviour had a will of His heavenly grace, to show us how the farthest off could be brought back to the Father’s heart, that every poor wandering soul, lost to God and itself, might feel after that blessed Hope and return.’

‘But,’ said Lockwood, ‘who knows the longful way it may be? and how one is ever to travel it over, is what I can’t see.’

‘It is but one step at a time,’ the blind man replied; ‘and He who gives grace for the first step will not fail till the last one be over. Our trust must just be wholly in Him, who is drawing our poor hearts to Himself; and do you think that He who could draw our souls by His grace when we were never so much as casting a look after Him, would give us up when our face was once set for Him? Sure the prodigal finds that out plain!’

‘No, I don’t suppose as He would,’ answered Lockwood the thrasher; ‘but what do you reckon the first step to be?’

‘Well,’ replied the blind man, ‘I suppose the Bible tells us that when it says of Saul the blasphemer, “Behold, he prayeth!”’

The thrasher looked up at the blind man; it seemed to him as if Benjamin Tovel had read his inmost heart and answered to the thoughts that were there. For was it not his own neglect of prayer that had brought conviction of sin that morning to him? But the blind man saw not the look fixed upon him, and, hearing no reply, he went on in his own quiet way. ‘Prayer, I reckon, must be the first step; and though ’tis a step that a little child may take, yet it spans the whole way between earth and heaven. For prayer takes hold of Christ, and to have a hold of Christ is to have a sure hold of heaven.’

‘Well, if I thought that, wouldn’t I pray!’ said the thrasher.

‘Prayer,’ said Benjamin Tovel, ‘is the breathing of the Holy Spirit within us. We must look up to God for the power to pray. It is not the repeating of words, but the desire of the heart that is prayer. If we long for the Saviour, and feel our sins against Him, we cannot help praying; or if our heart be dark and hard we can beg of Him to make it a new heart, filled with His love, and He will, for He does answer prayer.’

‘It comes to me,’ said Lockwood, ‘like a call from Him above bidding me come to Him, and by His help I will.’

‘There’s thousands,’ said the blind man, ‘to whom it has come as to you, and they proved it all true, and so will you if you follow on. The Bible is the glass that will show you your Saviour; you keep on at it, and never

give in till you see Him, and pray without ceasing: don't think it belongs only to morning and evening, but lift up your heart oftentimes unto God, and you will find light glimmer, and grow brighter and brighter, until you see the Saviour, and then your heart will rejoice, and no man can take that joy from you.'

The night had now darkened, and though the same to the blind man it was not to little Sue and the dog. The thrasher said he must see them safe to the barn; there Benjamin Tovel found his sanctuary for prayer, while the thrasher returned to his dwelling, and went to his chamber to pray. The visit paid by constraint had been so hallowed and sweetened to Benjamin Tovel, that his spirit was no longer oppressed in the thought of his early home. It was true that he had buried his earthly hopes from that home, but he had been led there again to welcome the immortal life of a soul new-born from above. It seemed now to him that the shadow of death hung no longer over that little dwelling of earth, but rather that heaven opened above it, and the angels of God ascending and descending. He never thought with sadness of his marriage home again, but always saw it illumined with light from above; it was from there that his wife and infant had been carried to heaven, and over it breathed the quickening Spirit of life. Well could he join in little Sue's psalm that evening and say, 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.'

The next morning little Sue was up early, not having had so long a walk the day before, and she was delighted

to stand out in the farm-yard, and watch all the life that was moving around her. She was standing there with her little tin mug in her hand, for her father had been drinking the fresh water that welled up from the beautiful spring; and the milkmaid seeing her called her into the cow-house, and gave her a little stool to sit there, that the sweet smell of the cows might make her grow hearty, and then milked one little stream into the tin mug. Little Sue was delighted to see milk that 'did bubble,' and wanted to take it to her father in the barn, but the milkmaid bade her drink it, and she should have another.

Lockwood the thrasher stepped out to the house for the basins of bread and milk, and both came in safely, to little Sue's delight, who had only one wish it seemed now in the world, and that was to 'have Sammy with we at the farm.' While they took their breakfast the thrasher sat down with them, and spoke again of the subject that filled his soul with a hope unknown before. So they passed half-an-hour, for the thrasher's time was so far his own, that he worked by weight of wheat, not by hours, and he knew he could make up that time in the day, so as not to be behindhand when the market measure was wanted. Just before the travellers started the thrasher's wife ran up with an apple-turnover for little Sue; it was packed up in paper, and so, she said, would ride safe enough in a basket; and then, amidst the blessings of earth and of heaven, they set forward again on their way.

Benjamin Tovel now directed his course to a large village that lay about four miles to the east of his master's farm. The walk was a lonely one, and no baskets were

sold on the way. About midday they arrived at the village, and, sitting down on some grass under a tree, they dined on the apple-turnover the wife of the thrasher had given. Then refreshed they made the round of the village, as far as the child could walk without over-fatigue. They sold as much basket-work as Benjamin Tovel could hope, and then again found shelter for the night in a barn. It was not like the last barn, this one was filled with peas, but the tired child was soon asleep on a heap of the stalks and pods that lay on the floor. The blind man was known at this farm when he was a shepherd, and had often brought sheep from his master's for sale, or for pasture; for the land became wilder and more open here, and many sheep were fed on the fine herbage thereabouts. This barn was in a field, so there was no pleasant farm-yard to amuse little Sue with its cheerful sights and sounds; but she was always happy with her father and Sharp. She missed the bread and milk for breakfast when she rose from her rough little bed; but she never wanted anything that was not given to her, and the bread and cheese they brought with them was not eaten yet, because they had found friends who had fed them. It was hard and stale, but it satisfied hunger. They drank from a little stream, had their morning service together, and then went on their way.

This day was Saturday, and Benjamin Tovel made his way back, not by the same roads, but to a little town that lay about four miles north of the village where his master's farm lay. Here he hoped he might sell the baskets still left. Here, too, he could spend the Sunday, and then he thought on the Monday to make his way

towards home, through the far-off end of the village to that where his master's farm lay. This he could do without stopping for the night, getting on the same day to a farm only four miles from the town where he lived ; he thought he might sell all his baskets, and yet, by starting early on Tuesday morning, walk the five miles without hurting the child, and be at home in his little shop by when market-people came. This was his plan, and all seemed to promise well, for the sale of his stock of work had been more than usually good. So on this Saturday they set out in good time from the barn filled with peas, and went cheerily forward on their way.

Until now the weather had been fine, but they had not walked far on this Saturday when a storm darkened the sky. They hastened on, but no shelter was near. Wind and rain drove fiercely along, the child's thin garments were soon clinging around her slender limbs, and though led by her father it was hard for her to keep on. The food too was soaked, and the ground was soon heavy with mud. Poor Sharp in the front held his way bravely on, facing the storm, and gently pulling at the string as if to help them along. Little Sue held on as long as she could, then said, ' Oh, daddy, we do be so tired ! let's we stop just a bit ! '

Her blind father lowered his baskets, and took her on his back ; there was no standing still, they must make their way on.

At length a cottage came in sight, the woman had opened the door, and was looking out into the driving rain as if expecting to see some one. It seemed that she saw not the one she expected, but she did see the blind man,

against whom the pitiless storm beat until he staggered beneath it and the weight that he bore.

‘Come in, come in here,’ said the woman.

Benjamin Tovel stopped in his blindness, hearing the voice, but not knowing whence it came. But Sharp heard it too, and turned at once to the door. Then the blind man held back saying, ‘We are all wringing wet, not fit to enter your door. I am in hope of reaching the town.’

‘You will be drowned before you can get there,’ said the woman. ‘The river’s overflowed its banks, and the rain will swell the current. Come in here, and don’t fear; you can’t make me worse. Dog and all, I see he is the right sort,’ she said, as Sharp half-ashamed of his boldness drew his blind master in.

‘There now, let down the child; poor rogue, what a sop! Well, I had lighted up a good fire expecting my old man in, but there’s no doubt they have kept him to a bit dinner where he works to-day, and you shall just stand in his shoes. Come here, my poor babe, to the fire, and let me have off these wet things!’ Then fetching an old blanket she wrapped the poor child in it. The comfort was so great of the warm blanket around her, and the warm fire by her side, that the little traveller, quite spent with her struggle with the storm, laid her head on the arm of the good woman’s chair, and in less than five minutes fell asleep.

‘That’s the comfort of young days,’ said the woman; ‘all their troubles end with sleep!’

‘And it will be our comfort, too,’ said Benjamin Tovel, ‘if we sleep in Jesus, we shall sorrow no more at all.’

‘There now!’ said the woman, ‘I didn’t think to hear

such words as those come from out of this storm. But what can be done for you? There's a great-coat of my old man's, a rare old coat it is, he'll be wishing he had it if he's out in this storm, but maybe he just left it here ready for you. So you put it on and I'll dry yours a bit, and as for the dog, I suppose he'll be all right?'

'Yes, thank you,' said the blind man; 'this is shelter indeed.'

While busy in all this truest charity, the woman every few minutes opened the door, unmindful of the pouring rain that streamed in; then, shutting it, said, 'I should not like my old man to be out in the storm, and not see his door open to hurry him in.' Then she added, 'But don't you feel noways ashamed if he comes. He is such a man for good ways, he is always a-tutoring of me. And won't he be pleased to see his home made a refuge, and the child in the corner, for he's none of his own!'

But her old man did not come, so, after feeling quite sure, she sat down to her frugal dinner, which she made Benjamin Tovel share. Sharp, too, had all the bits her kind hands could hunt up; but she would not wake the child, saying, 'Let her be, sleep is all as good as food to the poor tired babe; we can give her a bit when she wakes of herself.'

As they sat there at dinner they had pleasant discourse. This good woman was very unlike the thrasher's kind wife in one thing—she was ready to speak when words were wanted, but if Benjamin Tovel said a word her very silence invited him on. Only once she broke out, saying, 'That's just like my old man, he sees a deal further than I do. But I have a glimmer, and sure it can only come from the

Saviour, and I take comfort that it's like the star that led the wise men ; I keep looking up in its light, and it always minds me of Him !'

When little Sue woke, quite rested with sleep, her clothes were dry and warm, and the woman dressed her in them, then gave her food, and the child had revived again as bright as when she started that morning.

Before sunset the storm cleared away ; Benjamin Tovel felt anxious to go, and the good woman would not detain him, though she said, ' She did wish her old man had come in before they had to go.' Warned by her, Benjamin Tovel turned from the road that would have led him by the river over the wooden bridge, and went the further way over a bridge of solid masonry to the town ; thinking as he went how goodness and mercy had followed him, and thinking, too, what it was to be led by the Good Shepherd. Who need fear any evil that had His presence with them ? The kind woman only thought of having sheltered a blind man and his child ; but there was One even then saying, ' Ye have done it unto Me.' And though in her thoughts the act was but nature, yet done as it had been with heavenly love in her heart, the reward would be of grace, and abundantly given.

They reached the little town, safe, warm, and dry, and went to a wayside inn that suited travellers so poor. It was, too, a respectable little inn, kept by people who made their honest living by fair means ; what they sold they sold pure. They kept a cow also, and did a little farming in a very small way. They knew the blind man well, as he had been there before, and the woman welcomed him in, and said she could lodge him better that night than she had done before ; for she had a little room empty, and a bed

where he might sleep for sixpence a-night. This was no little comfort. The market had long been over, Benjamin Tovel could not hope to sell any baskets, but he had no regrets, he had been saved out of trouble, and he went thankfully to rest in the little room ready for him, and Sharp was allowed to sleep within-doors.

Sunday morning rose fair; Benjamin Tovel was able, at the wayside inn, to have milk and bread for their breakfast. Then strengthened in body they went out to church. Sharp went with them, but without his string, as little Sue could guide her father, and when they went in Sharp would wait outside the door. It kindled the soul of the blind man when the prayers and thanksgivings arose. The child listened too; her young spirit, trained in prayer, felt at home in the worship of God. Happily for little Sue and for all who worshipped there, the Belief, in which we record the wondrous history of our Lord, was not hurried over, as it too often is in less than a minute, but time was given for thought and feeling to breathe it. And when the joyful sentence came, 'The third day He rose again from the dead,' there was a gladness in the tone of the minister that seemed to express the change from death unto life, and the child remembered her story of the churchyard, and slipped her hand into her father's, who understood the token well, and his thoughts followed hers through the grave and gate of death to that joyful resurrection.

Heavy rains fell again that night, but the travellers were sheltered. Through the thin wooden partition in their chamber they heard the voice of the innkeeper in prayer. He was offering many petitions for good and against evil, and amongst them they heard him pray that

he and his wife might be kept from the love of money, and the desire of unlawful gain. This desire showed at once the source from which arose his honest dealing and wish for the welfare of all. Many a keeper of inns and lodging-houses great and small, it is to be feared, must one day look back with sorrow and shame on the trade that was not honest, and often made the occasion of evil. But this inn-keeper will not have that grief ; and many, we trust, will be found then like him, to have prayed from the heart, 'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,' and to have watched against temptation's power and put away from them all dishonest gain and unrighteous dealing, walking before God and man in truth and uprightness. 'Keep innocency and take heed to the thing that is right, for that shall bring a man peace at the last.'

CHAPTER XI.

HEAVY autumnal rains fell again on that night, but the morning rose clear and bright. Benjamin Tovel spent two hours in the town, selling a few baskets there. This left only three of his stock on hand, and he hoped he might dispose of these three on his way. They now set their faces for home, thinking to reach and cross the far end of the parish where they spent the first two nights of their journey, sleeping two miles farther on, and reaching home in good time for market-people next day. They were now on the right side of the stream, and would not have to cross it again. After three miles of lanes they came to pasture land; this lasted for some way by the side of the river. Here they made their halt for rest, not intending to stop again until they reached the farm where they expected to sleep, four miles from the town. Little Sue was getting used to her long walks, and bore them well; indeed her light form was no weight for her feet clad in good boots to carry. They found a seat on the trunk of a fallen tree, and took their refreshments and then hastened on. Benjamin Tovel had heard at his master's farm that a man of wealth had hired the large farm at this end of the parish, called the Grange, and the basket-maker had intended to make his way there and try his success at that door; but having waited in the little town, the day was

now advancing, and he felt unwilling to cross and recross the river again. The stream was full to its brink, and flowing rapidly down, and in the distance he could hear the roar of the waters as they turned the great wheel of a mill.

‘Keep close by me here,’ the blind man said to his child, and Sue came and took hold of his coat. They had walked on some way in silence, when Sharp gave a bound towards the river. Little Sue looked, and a scream from his child stayed the steps of the blind man. ‘Oh, Sharp!’ she exclaimed, and the dog bounded again, the blind man let go the string; a moment more, and a plunge told that Sharp was in the stream. Then a shout rose in the distance from voices of men, and Sue put her hand in her father’s and said, ‘Oh, daddy, ’tis a child! a little child in the river!’

Then the voices drew nearer. Then the tramp of horse-hoofs that galloped fast on, and a man’s voice in anguish, said, ‘My child! oh, my child!’ ‘The dog is in,’ shouted the men; ‘’tis a chance he may save her.’ The voices came from the opposite side of the river, the deep moan of the mill-stream filled the ears of the blind man, the current was hurrying the helpless child on to the dark gulf and crushing wheel, and the dog, would he follow? Sharp would never give in,—never turn back alone; this his master knew well. Then a cry burst again from the men, ‘Cheer him on! Cheer him on! He is almost up to her now!’ Then a silence of breathless excitement, intense looks on the stream, on the helpless child, and the dog.

Benjamin Tovel alone stood calm in his blindness, with

his face raised to heaven, and his hands clasped in prayer. Would any think of the blind man as helpless? Rather might they then see a reason why blindness should separate between some and the turmoil of earth, for who else in that awful moment could gather up their thoughts to a prayer? With all beside him it was helpless excitement, for what could they do? They pressed to the edge of the river, but who, unable to swim, could enter its current as it bore swiftly down with the open jaws of the mill-wheel in view? Yet they strained every nerve in intense suspense; while Benjamin Tovel stood where Sharp left him, asking deliverance from heaven.

The men followed the dog by the side of the river. 'There! there! he has her! Brave old fellow! here! here!' and the men leaned over the bank to encourage the dog, who tried once and again to turn against the stream with the burden he bore. 'On, on!' cried the men; but Sharp was struggling still; at last he swam round with his head from the wheel. Then a shout rose from the river brink, and the men tried all means to entice the dog to shore where they could help him to land, and where the child's father stood pale and silent as death. But Sharp knew but one master, the blind man on the other side, who stood there in calmness, waiting for him. When little Sue saw that Sharp was making way for the side where they stood, she let go her father's hand, and ran towards him with arms stretched out to the dog and the child that he bore. Sharp made a desperate effort, laid his burden on the grass safe beside little Sue; then, streaming with water and spent with the struggle, he reached his master's feet and lay down exhausted there.

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Meanwhile one of the men had run and crossed the river by a wooden bridge, and the father, seeing the child landed safe, hastened too. The man saw him coming and stood beside the child, who lay all unconscious with her head on little Sue's arm. The father took her up, 'There must be hope!' he said; 'I will carry her home.' Then telling the man to take the horse and ride for the doctor, he hurried on, only turning a moment to say to Benjamin Tovel as he stood some little way off, 'My good friend, make haste to my house,—the red house over there. Bring the dog and the child.' One of the men on the other side had run to bear the tidings of safe on land to the mother, in her anguish at home. The rest turned away when the excitement was over, and Benjamin Tovel and his child were left alone, with Sharp panting before them.

Little Sue's garments were wet with embracing the child; and now she knelt down to comfort by her caresses the exhaustion of the dog. Deep was the thanksgiving from the heart of the blind man; had they not been passing by at that moment the child must have been lost. Then he heard the hard breathing of the dog, and knelt down by his side and held bread in his hand, but Sharp would not eat. Little Sue watched in the greatest distress as he lay stretched out at full length, his eye now turned on his blind master, now looking after her. 'Oh, daddy, will he die?' And she burst into tears at the thought of that grief, and from the blind man's darkened eyes there stole down slow drops of sorrow which fell on the dog, whom his hand still caressed. Sharp heard the child cry, and closed his eyes as if in silent despair. It was plain the dog was quite exhausted, and they were left

alone. The blind man could venture nowhere, and how could he trust little Sue by the terrible river ! The bridge that crossed it there was at that time only of wood, with a rail on one side, and the stream flowed level with it, swollen high by the rain, so that to get even a first footing on it required some caution now.

‘ We can do nothing, little one, but wait here,’ he said. ‘ If we be forgotten on earth, there is One above who thinketh upon the poor and needy, and I am sure such are we. Help will come, we must wait !’ But at the Grange all were engrossed by the child, and the suspense while life hung in doubt. The master had said, ‘ Take care of the man and the dog when they come.’ And having said that, he, for a time, thought no more on the subject, feeling sure they would follow, and supposing them there.

But now the sun was declining, and the air growing chill, and the cold mist of the river began to fold its damp mantle around them. It rose heavily, and soon would conceal them from sight. There was death in remaining in those damps for the night, for the ground under their feet had been soaked with the rains ; yet no power to leave them seemed given them then. The blind man called his child to him, opened his coat and folded her close, trusting to shield her from the chill of the air, but her little garments were wet, and she shivered with cold. Even now from the heavy air around him the blind man, who knew those river fogs well, feared that they must be hid from all who might pass within call.

While bereft almost of hope, a large dog made his way with swift foot through the fog ; he had evidently come on a sagacious scent of some one there, and now perceiving

them to be in a helpless condition, he came nearer, smelt the dog, looked up at the blind man, and stood still beside them. Benjamin Tovel's spirits revived; he said, 'Here is comfort: this dog has a master, and we shall be saved.' Still the dog waited. Then a whistle was heard, the dog pricked his ears, but did not leave them. The whistle pierced the fog again, and the dog gave a bark. A few moments more of lightened suspense, and a man came in view,—a broad-chested, strong-built, labouring man, with a face whose kindly glow shed a sunbeam upon them. The man looked on the blind traveller with his child in his bosom, on the dog exhausted and wet at his feet, breathing heavily, and his languid eye closing. The man looked upon them a moment in silence, then said, 'What has happened here? You are travellers, I take it? What ails the dog?'

'We are travellers,' answered Benjamin Tovel, 'and the dog plunged in the river and brought a drowning child safe to land; but he lies spent with the struggle, and I, sir, am blind.'

'And where's the child?' asked the man. 'Whose child did he save? Is the child here in the fog?'

'No,' answered Benjamin Tovel, 'there were many near then, and they carried the child home; to the Grange they said it belonged, and told us to follow: but the dog could not stand, and I durstn't trust my child, and I am quite blind.'

'From the Grange? Farmer Burton's child could it be? And they left you to perish, and the dog dying already! Why, it makes one feel mad! But cheer up, you're safe now, and the dog shall be cared for. You

shall find that there's heart in this bad old world still! Wait here, just a minute, and I'll be back again!' Then laying down his rough coat, he said, 'Sit there on that; the ground is soaking wet with the rains we have had. Now, Nep, you lie there, and keep these poor folks warm, if you can!'

Then the man hastened away, and it was not long before they heard a loud hearty 'halloo!' There was life in the sound; even poor Sharp raised an ear, but it fell quickly again; then through the mist the loud 'halloo' rang once more! Nep barked, as if in reply, but another voice shouted 'halloo' back again. Then all was silent until, when a few more minutes had gone, and the dense fog seemed to stifle the breath of the child, the man returned, bringing with him another; they bore a hurdle in hand, and the other, who was but a lad, pressed eagerly on.

'It is them, for certain such a dog never breathed, and left to die in the fog!'

'Here,' said the first man, 'can the little child walk? She is cold and stiff, I declare! Still, she had best walk, if she can. Give the coat to the poor dog.'

And with careful hands they laid first the coat on the hurdle, then lifted Sharp on it, the other dog standing by in his mute compassion.

'You'll be taking them off to the Grange?' said the young lad.

'No, not I,' answered the other; 'I'll have no hand in that. They that once left them to perish may look to it now!'

Benjamin Tovel heard some debate as to where they

were to go, and said, 'If you can shelter a poor man for the night, sir, pray take us with you. The dog and the child will both die without some tender care, and where can it be found if we be once parted from you?'

Benjamin Tovel's whole heart overflowed to his deliverer, and it looked like death returning to be parted from him again.

'That's what I hold to, home with me,' said the man. 'If you have never heard speak of my missus, you will soon know what it is to set foot in her door.'

'Is the dog likely to hold out till we can get him some cheer?' Benjamin Tovel asked, in a mingling of hope and fear.

'Yes, for all I can tell,' the friendly man replied. 'But you come home to my missus; there's none can go further than she in bringing back life to those given over for dead. Let us once get to her, and there'll be a power of comfort, you'll see; this lad here knows as well as I that what I say is true.'

'True enough,' said the other. 'Come, see now, can't you walk?' for the blind man's limbs were benumbed, and he was spent with all that had passed in these few hours by the river. 'I can tell you, she you be going to saved my life outright, when I was ill with the small-pox, and none else would come nigh; and she can say those sort of things I have not cared to forget. I say she's a woman as makes affliction a blessing! There, now, lay a hand on my shoulder, and you'll manage to walk; I have got your baskets safe on my back.'

The first man had been laying the poor dog 'more easy,' as he said, and speaking to him a bit, bidding him

keep his heart up. 'There now, he understands that ! They are so sensible like ! Let's move on a bit.'

The man and the lad carried Sharp on the hurdle ; the blind man laid his hand on the young shoulder beside him ; little Sue held her father's hand, and Nep followed behind. They walked slowly on, remembering the blind man and child, and now and then a pleasant word cheered the strangers along.

'I can't think now,' said the lad, 'what master will say when he hears what has happened, with you almost dead in the fog ! I have made up my mind just to run back to-night, for he is that sort of man I don't believe he would sleep, nor let any one else that had feet to run on. I was one of them that stood on the other side of the river, but the moment I saw the child safe on land I made no more ado there, but ran off to our mistress, for I said, 'She'll be dead there with terror before any can tell her it's well with the child !'

'I hope it is well,' said the blind man.

'I can promise you that,' answered the lad. 'I stayed till I heard them say she was safe to live, and then I went off to fodder the cattle, and was now making my way back to the Grange to see all safe with you. I am sure I never misdoubted but you would be there, for if you'll believe me, I didn't note you were blind.'

'It's all for the best,' answered Benjamin Tovel. 'If we had been fetched to the great house, I fear the dog would have died.'

'That's a sure word,' said the man in front. 'I'll be bound there's but one that can save him. She will ! and that's for why it was all ordered so !'

No wonder the spirit of the blind man revived under such an outpouring from true hearts as this. They left the fatal fields, then trod a long country road,—very long it did seem to the blind man and his child.

‘There, now,’ said the first man, ‘we have passed the bounds; we are in our parish now, and half a mile will bring us home.’

Little Sue made no complaint, though her tired feet almost refused to bear her on; and the blind man believed that strength would hold out. They had been delivered, they should not faint now. At length they turned down a lane, and soon a light from a casement came full in view. Little Sue looked up in hope. ‘Here we are,’ said the man. He gave a whistle, and a light moved through the open door of the cottage now in sight. A glow of ruddy hue was seen through the door, and a woman hastened with a light to the low garden stile. She stood in silence a moment, seeing her husband and the lad with a hurdle borne between them; then, before she could inquire, that cheery voice said, ‘All’s right; we have only brought you some poor folk and a dog, dead in saving a child: but you’ll fetch him back again I know before long.’ The wife meanwhile in silence had lifted out the movable stile, and held the light lower, by way of guiding them in.

‘Here, I say,’ said the lad, ‘give this poor man a hand, mother; he is blind: and there is a child too. If you would blow out the candle you’d see.’

‘I can see,’ said the woman. ‘Here, sir, take my hand. You poor little thing! we’ll soon get you in;’ and

little Sue looked up to the dear face of compassion above her.

Within the cottage a bright fire burned on the hearth, a white cloth covered the table, and supper was set. The cottage-room looked more beautiful to poor little Sue than any room she had ever seen before. It was of a good size, with bright furniture round; a rug before the fire, and little stools in the chimney-corner.

'Here's a seat,' said the woman, leading the blind man to a high-backed arm-chair that stood close by the fire. She set little Sue on a stool beside it, and turned to the dog.

'Why, he's soaking wet! bring him here to the fire. Has he been in the river?'

'Yes,' answered the lad; 'he saved the child at the Grange by a more desperate swim than ever I saw, and brought the drowning babe with such a struggle to land as left him spent for his pains.'

'Lay him here,' said the woman; 'warmth will help him the best, when we can get it inside and out. I'll get you some flannel, Michael, and you give him a rub.'

'Now, if that isn't just the thing!' said the lad: 'I was right certain you'd know, or I would never have had a hand to carry him off from the Grange; for my master, I know well enough what a fatigue he will be in when he finds they are gone.'

'He should have sent and seen to that sooner,' said the first man. 'If I had not passed, and Nep found them out, they would all have been the wrong side of help pretty near by this time, left belated there in the terrible fog.'

'How came you by the river?' inquired his wife.

'I went to the Grange,' replied the man, 'to look after some sheep we have out to feed there. I was afraid the rains of last night might have done them some hurt; so you see it was ordered I should be passing that way. The fog was so thick I should never have seen them squatted there on the ground. I had need of both eyes to keep clear of the river in crossing the bridge. But Nep found them, and barked when I called, all the same as he would if he had found a sheep out in trouble.'

'Does he dry up at all?' asked the woman of Michael.

'He feels me rubbing, and likes it well, and that's something,' said the lad.

'Well, you keep on — not too hard — he hasn't strength to bear much. I'll make him a posset as soon as I have seen to the child.'

She reached a hand to little Sue, untied her bonnet, took off her cloak, and when she saw the fair little face with its sad, tired look, she gave it a kiss, and said, 'We shall save the poor dog! But how wet you are! was all that the fog?'

'I can tell,' said Michael; 'the dog would not come out our side, though we 'ticed him all we could; he made for the other, and she ran to the river brink, and he scrambled out where she stood; he laid the child at her feet, and she got its head on her knee, and her arms about it, all the same as if she had been as wise as the old, and had the knowledge that she ought to hold up the head of the drowned. I ran off at that to let my mistress know, for I was the far side of the river, you see.'

'Sit a minute by the fire,' said the woman, 'while I make the posset; the dog must not wait longer, and I don't think you'll hurt there.'

'No, thank you kindly,' said Benjamin Tovel, 'this is life from the dead!'

It was pleasant to see the poor dog by the fire, the strong, kindly hands rubbing dry his wet coat. The woman now hastened and made a posset for Sharp—it was made of hot milk and treacle, and whatever else might be be right—it did not take long preparing, and she gave it to Michael.

'He won't drink,' said the lad.

'But he must,' said the woman; 'give it here to me.' Then, taking a spoon, she knelt down by the dog as one used to tend sick creatures, which Sharp had sense left to know. He soon swallowed the posset, and she laid his head down again. 'There, now let him rest; I wouldn't rub any more.'

'Then I'll be off now, because of letting master know.'

'Now, Michael, if the fog lie as heavy as you say, it is not fit you should go by that swollen river to-night.'

'Oh, mother, don't I know every foot of the way? and I won't take the plank, but go round by the bridge.'

'There and back again! it isn't safe, Michael, I say.'

'Well, then I will stay on at master's to-night; he'll be glad enough I should if I take him good news. You don't see fear for the dog now, I suppose, mother; do you?' And Michael returned to take one more look at Sharp: and as he stroked him down the dog gave a weak wag of

his tail. 'There's a good fellow now; that was meant as answer to me, just to say he should live: I shall go freely for that. He's a fine old fellow, isn't he? If you had but seen him, what a leap he did give, right into the river's midst; and then when he turned, how he did breast the stream! Well, good night, old fellow; I'll have another rub to-morrow. Good night, mother; and you, sir; and you, little dear. You will be all right by the morning, I am sure, resting here.'

'I will look round now,' said the husband, 'and settle Nep in, and do what's wanted outside, then I shall not have to turn out again. Is Nep's supper ready?'

'Yes, you will find it all ready.' And the man went out to see all well around.

Then the woman said to the child,—

'Now I must put some dry clothing on you.' And going upstairs she came presently back with a complete little set of child's clothes in her hand. 'I must warm these,' she said, 'for they have been lying by.' She held them to the fire, then took little Sue and clothed her in such garments as she had never worn before, so good and so pretty. Little Sue looked down in surprise, then up at that kind face, and saw a sadness upon it; but the woman smiled at her, then smoothed the child's clustering hair, and longed in her heart that the blind father could look on his child as she sat by his side. And she said to him, 'I wish I could help you to dry clothing as well as the child.'

'There's no need for that,' said the blind man, 'I have been used to all weathers. I once was a shepherd, and my fathers before me.'

'Are you, then,' said the woman, 'that shepherd that served Farmer Deeks, and had the fever so bad?'

'Yes, I am,' answered the blind man. 'That rough wave is past and gone, and this, which seemed like to come over as heavy, has broken in blessings upon us.'

'God grant it may!' said the woman. 'I have often thought of you. And is that the child that had to bide in the workhouse?'

'Yes, my little Sue,' said the blind man, and little Sue looked up at her father.

'I only heard of all your troubles long after,' said the woman; 'but if I had known at the time, I always felt I would have taken the motherless babe, and trusted by proper care to keep my own from infection.'

'Then you be blessed with children?' said Benjamin Tovel.

'Yes, indeed I am.'

But at this moment the husband came in.

'Well it's all right for the night, and we all want our supper, I guess. Don't you, my poor child? But you don't look poor now. Is that the mother that has made you so tidy?' And he looked on the child, then at his wife, who met his look through a tear that filled her eyes, and he said, 'Sure I know those little clothes.' And she answered,—

'Yes; but the child is worthy of them. Did you ever see such a fair little face?' And he answered,—

'Tis a blessing to have saved her!' Then, aloud, 'Now then let us sup.'

At supper the woman told her husband who their visitor was; and he was greatly struck, saying how often

he had thought of the trouble fallen on him; it made him twice over thankful that he had been sent there to save him.

Before they sat down to supper the husband gave thanks for the food then before them, and the deliverance that had been given. And now at supper the strangers soon became as friends, united by that love which though new is yet old, and when it kindles responsively in those but now met, reveals the tie of a brotherhood that had existed unknown, and will abide without end.

Little Sue had her supper of hot bread and milk, and, unused to take anything without giving Sharp some, she left her little stool and got down on the floor, close by Sharp. The woman watched her, but said nothing. Then the child took a piece of soaked bread in her fingers, and gave it to the dog, who took it from her, and swallowed it; and she looked up with a face all beaming in joy, saying,—

‘He did eat!—He did eat! Daddy, won’t he live now?’

‘Yes, I think he is doing well,’ said that kind woman’s voice; ‘it was the best sign he could give, eating your bread.’ Then the child went on feeding him, and the dog took all she gave.

‘There now,’ said the woman, ‘can you eat bread and butter? Because we can’t feed the dog, and send you hungry to bed. We will try him with some more milk to-night. You sit here, and eat this.’ So little Sue sat quite content by that good woman’s side, and finished her tea, with her eyes growing sleepy.

‘I fear,’ said Benjamin Tovel, ‘I ought to have had

more thought for the night. It will put you out sadly to have us sleeping here.'

'Not that,' said the woman, 'if you can sleep in that chair. I have no bedroom ready, and the chair may be as well. I can make up a little bed for the child on the floor.'

'I am sure,' said Benjamin Tovel, 'this is such comfort as we are not used to. I have not had such a feeling since I sat by my own hearth, when my Susan was living, and I had my sight.'

'That's pleasant hearing, I am sure,' said the man; 'I think we had better go betimes to rest to-night, for the poor child's tired out.'

'Don't let us put you out of your way,' said the blind man; 'she will sleep on my knee. Here, little one, come and get a sleep with me.'

'Let's we sing first, daddy,' said the child.

'Do you sing?' asked the woman; and little Sue made an effort to answer, and said, in her own peculiar forms of speech,—

'When we has had we teas, we sings we hymns.'

The woman smiled on her in that motherly love that the child that remembers not its own mother's tenderness yet truly feels.

'Will you sing with the child?' the woman asked of the blind man.

'Then I think we must say our Psalm first,' he replied; and, verse by verse with little Sue he repeated, 'The Lord is my Shepherd;' and when could its blessed record of a love passing knowledge have come home with more power to those gathered there? Then the child sang

with her father, her clear little voice rippling on by the deeper cadence of his :—

‘Commit thou all thy griefs,
And ways into His hands,
To His sure truth and tender care,
Who earth and heaven commands.

‘Who points the clouds their course,
Whom winds and seas obey,
He shall direct thy wandering feet,
He shall prepare thy way.

‘Put thou thy trust in God,
In duty’s path go on;
Fix on His word thy steadfast eye,
So shall thy work be done.

‘No profit canst thou gain
By self-consuming care,
To Him commend thy cause; His ear
Attends the softest prayer.

‘Give to the winds thy fears,
Hope and be undismayed;
God hears thy sighs, and counts thy tears;
God shall lift up thy head.

‘Through waves, and clouds, and storms,
He gently clears thy way;
Wait thou His time, thy darkest night
Shall end in brightest day.’

The woman and her husband both felt the hymn greatly, and she said to the child, ‘You will sing some day in heaven;’ for a feeling came over her from the first, as if the child were not long for this earth.

‘With the angels,’ answered little Sue, who considered the blessed hope as beyond any doubt.

‘Will you take our evening prayer?’ the man asked of Benjamin Tovell. ‘I am sure you are able to do that without the sight of your eyes.’

'I am spent in body and mind to-night, I fear,' said the blind man; 'and to be a silent worshipper is the best help for me.' So the man led the evening prayer from a book well worn with long use. Then wishing the father and child 'one of the best of good-nights,' he went to his upper room, when he had first brought down a little flock bed for Sue. This was made up beside her father; but before she would go to her little bed she knelt at her father's knees, and offered, in her own words, her thanksgiving and prayer,—and not knowing by what name to call the good woman, she said, 'Bless the kind mammy here, and the kind man who did bring we safe home, and let poor Sharp live and be quite well;' and adding her other petitions, she ended her infant prayer, and, laid to rest by the woman, dropped at once off to sleep.

Sharp drank up some milk, the fire was then made up, a blanket given to the blind man, and the woman left them for the night.

When the woman went to her room, she said to her husband, 'How heavenly it was to hear them sing! I say, wasn't it, Jem?'

And he answered, 'Yes, lovely. I don't know how I feel, but it comes to me almost as if Old Willy were back. And to think of them perishing there in the fog by the cold river bed, and the dog dying too! But that's all over now, and we are blessed in the saving them.'

'Oh, but that child!' said the woman; 'she's got safe in my heart. She's almost like our own little Peace come back to us again. I couldn't help dressing her up in our pretty one's clothes, and how sweet she did look in them! didn't she, Jem?'

'Yes, I do say it's all over a comfort,' he answered.

And so it was with Jem and with Patience his wife that the blind man and his child had found their happy refuge. It was in old Willy's chair Benjamin Tovel now slept, and under the roof still held sacred to him. No wonder that their sleep was sweet to them.

CHAPTER XII.

JEM and Patience rose early. Patience always gave her husband his breakfast before he started for work. She was a good wife to him, and made his home his delight. She always looked after him when he left the door, and prayed in her heart for his safe return, for she said, 'We can never tell what may happen to hurt the body or the soul between the dawn and the night.' On this next morning, hastening down first with her candle, she saw that the poor dog had changed his posture. 'He will live now,' she said. 'Oh, Jem, he will live!'

'I knew he would,' said Jem, as he hurried in to look at him.

'That's more than I did,' replied Patience; 'I thought the hope was but small.'

'You don't know how to value the skill you have been trained to,' said her husband, with some pride of feeling.

'Oh, Jem!' said the gentle reproving voice of his wife.

'I know!' he replied: 'tis no merit of ours, but a healing gift from above.'

'How have you slept, sir?' said Patience; 'we seem all for the dog.'

'Never better in my life,' answered Benjamin Tovel; 'it was wholly a night of comfort.'

'I knew there was rest in that chair,' said Jem; 'one sat there for years whose life was a blessing. The very chair seems to speak of goodness to me.'

'God showeth mercy to thousands in them that love Him,' the blind man replied, 'and so the peace of him you speak of breathes in this house for many.'

'I shall find you here,' said Jem, 'when I come home to-night. The dog cannot travel yet. How nicely the child lies sleeping there! You won't be long without breakfast, I have to start early; we always have a short morning prayer, and I shall take it a comfort to have you offer it.' They knelt, and the blind man prayed.

'Father of mercies and God of all comfort, we humbly thank Thee for the goodness and mercy that has followed us all the days of our life, and for our safety and rest in the night that is past. Let Thy tender mercies come unto us this day, O Lord, even Thy salvation, according to Thy word. Cause us to hear Thy loving-kindness this morning, and to know the way wherein we should walk, for we lift up our soul unto Thee. Do good, O Lord, unto those that be good, and may many this day be turned to righteousness. Remember for good these Thy servants, who for Thy Name's sake have ministered and yet do minister to the poor and needy, that their reward may be great. Cleanse us from all sin and evil, and enable us to abide in the Lord Jesus Christ, that when He who is our life shall appear, we may appear with Him in glory. Bless the children of Thy servants, and may they live in Thy sight. Let the precious blood of our Redeemer, and the robe of His righteousness, cover us in Thy presence this day; and may the Spirit of Truth lead us into all truth, and take of

the things that are our Lord Jesus Christ's, and show them unto us. We beseech Thee to bless us, and to make us a blessing, according to the word upon which Thou hast caused us to hope. We beseech Thee to supply all our need this day, out of the riches of Thy grace which is in Christ Jesus. Receive and accept us in Him our merciful Saviour, who hath taught us when we pray to say, Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.'

Jem and Patience breathed a hearty 'Amen.' Then, with a warm grasp of the hand of his blind guest, Jem hastened off to his work.

Patience now began to prepare for the day; her first work was the milking her cow. Then she came in with milk for the dog, which he lapped up with pleasure, looking up, as Patience said, so grateful, that he wanted not words. Then when Patience asked him, he rose on his feet and moved from the fire, which she wanted to clean up and light. Sharp walked to the little bed on the floor where the tired child lay sleeping, stood looking at her a few minutes, then lay down at its foot; he still looked exhausted and tired, but it was plain now he would live. The fire soon crackled and blazed, the room was swept clean, and the furniture dusted. All done in that quiet, pleasant way, which seemed like a dream to the blind man, for it brought back the remembrance of his own wife and of

home. Patience did her work in silence; she was a woman of few words, but those few made a greater impression than many; for when she did speak, it was always something you were glad to have said. Jem would say of his wife, 'If you don't pick up her words when she drops them, you may go far for any others so good, and I can promise she won't give you many.' Oh, the rest of that arm-chair to the poor wayfaring man, with this sweet sense of home around him again, not obliged to do all things himself in his blindness and in his poor little place, with nothing hardly to use, and fearing for little Sue when she tried to work, for he still seemed to think of her almost as the infant child she was when his eyes last rested on that sweet little face. But no repining mingled in his feeling, he only gave silent thanks that he was once more within shelter of a blessed home, such as once was his own.

'Why you are not helpless!' said Patience, as the blind man came in from his favourite stream of cold water at the pump.

'The air feels healthy and dry,' said Benjamin Tovel: 'I think the day will be fine.'

'Now the kettle boils,' said Patience, 'and we will breakfast in quiet before I wake up my children. We had best let your dear child sleep on. She looks lovely there on the pillow; there's a bloom on her cheek, and her blue eyes not quite shut, and her little fair curls round her head, and a dear smile on her lips.'

There was a most touching expression on the face of the blind man as he listened to this description of his child. 'Bless you for those words,' he said; 'you have given me a picture that my dark eyes can look on. None ever told

me before that the little one was so fair to see. She'll be like her mother! I pray that she may in her words and ways. I do catch the dear tones of her mother's own voice at times when the child is speaking to any.'

After breakfast Patience cleared away all from the table to her little back-kitchen, built on behind, then hastened to dress her children, and came down with a boy of two years old in her arms, and little Alice of four. Peace, her first-born child, had not long before left her earthly home for a heavenly, and her mother wept for her still. It was in some of the treasured-up garments Peace needed no more, that the mother had clad little Sue. The children at first looked much surprised at all, and Alice clung to her mother, but little Willy—for Jem would call his first son by that name of dear memory and sacred to him—little Willy soon crawled up to Sharp, where he lay near the sleeping child, and began to pat him, and put his arm round his neck, as he was accustomed to do with their own great dog Nep. Patience saw that the dog seemed well pleased with the child, and let him play on, as thinking it good for the dog to be gently roused to take notice of something fresh. Patience led little Alice to the small bed on the floor where the tired child still slept; she looked a moment, then jumped at her mother's side, saying, 'Sissy, sissy!' supposing it to be her little sister Peace come back again. A tear dimmed the mother's eye, but she said nothing, and led her away.

There was much more animation now in the room, and little Sue awoke. Patience gave her little son to Benjamin Tovel, saying, 'Will you take him while I dress the dear child? He will be ready enough if you talk to him a little.'

Benjamin Tovel held out his arms, cheered to feel himself called to be a nursing father again. And Patience carried the little stranger-child upstairs in her arms, she was so light and small! It reminded her how often she had carried her own little Peace, and it soothed the mother's heart to dress so fair a child in the little wardrobe she had thought to wait years before using again. When prepared for the day, little Sue asked of Patience, 'What mammy are you?' Patience did not quite understand at first, and the child said, 'There is my own mammy in heaven, and Sammy's mammy by home, what mammy are you?'

'Mammy Patience,' she answered, for she felt it would be dear to hear her own name again from the lips of a child.

Little Sue looked thoughtful a moment, then said, 'Mammy Patience, shall we say we prayers?'

Patience answered 'Yes,' and she sat beside the child while in broken sentences she offered her morning thanksgiving and supplication to heaven. Then leading her down, Patience found her little Alice at the blind man's knee, and both her children in fixed attention to the story of the dove that Noah took into the ark.

'I have brought down the little dove,' Patience said; 'glad enough I am that this is the ark that has taken her in!' The blind man smiled a long-forgotten smile, for though a look of serenest peace was impressed on his face, it was long since a smile had kindled upon it; none remembered to have seen it since the grave closed on his home. But amidst the unlooked-for trials of this journey, a life and light had been brightening over all that before wore only the aspect of sadness.

Little Sue had made a third listener at her blind father's knee, and now the sweet story ended, though the children still looked up in expectation, Patience called them to breakfast, for their brimming basins of bread and milk were all ready. To their great delight, Sharp finished what was left for him in the basin of each; and though he could not stand long, he had walked to them for it.

'A little and often, is best for him to-day,' said Patience; 'to-morrow we must manage to get him a bone.'

They were now the happiest party that could possibly be. Little Alice called Sue 'Sissy,' and Sue called her Ali; the little Willy she called 'Baby-boy!' Patience found she had in the blind man a most beguiling nurse. The children seemed to understand that he wanted their care; little Willy stroked his face, and Alice led him out to walk and sit in the garden with her, while little Sue was most often by the side of Patience, who loved to feel her there, and spent many looks on her young face that day. There was a grave tenderness in Patience that won the child, and Patience brought out for her some of the books last used by little Peace. A motherless child from Ivy Lane had a double interest for her, recalling as it did to her the days of her childhood, so long passed away.

When the early stir of the morning was over, Patience sat down to her needle, and little Sue sat on a stool by her side; and Patience listened to her stories of her home, of Sammy, and Mammy Garson and Rachel, and the gentleman who brought her her new boots on market-day, and the red socks that came in a parcel. Benjamin Tovel was seated on the bench outside, the same bench that old

Willy had sat on long before, beneath the clustering leaves of the vine, and the roses that lingered still blooming around. Little Willy was on his knee. Alice had taken her stool by his side, charmed to have the companionship of some one not busy, who listened, answering kindly to her inexpressible thoughts. Her infant sympathies were strong by nature; she was the child of parents who had nurtured compassion. Her attentions charmed the blind man; his love for children was great, and they solaced him now.

When little Sue had ended her tales of Ivy Lane, full of a special interest to Patience, whose first memories lay there, she waited silent awhile. Patience, too, was silent, it was her habit to be so; and her thoughts had been led back by the child to her own sadder memories of home. At length little Sue seemed to suppose that it rested with her to make the time pleasant, and she said, 'Shall we tell the story daddy tells in the churchyard?'

'Yes,' said Patience; 'tell me.'

'It is all about the tomb in the rock, and our Saviour, who rose from the dead, and the great mighty angel came down, all shining and white. Do you know about that?'

'I have heard it,' said Patience, 'but you tell me again.'

'Then we'll tell it,' said little Sue, who seemed not to know that there was such a word as 'I,' or as 'me.' The story was told as a child only could tell it; and as the mother sat and listened, the resurrection glory beamed bright on her soul, gently healing the wound the buried form of little Peace had left in her heart.

While this happy converse was spending the fresh

autumn morning, a light cart drove up, and the young man sprang out who crossed the river by the bridge when the rescued child was laid on the grass. He was once the little Benjamin, who had helped his elder brothers and his young master to pile up old Willy's fire. His father, now in old age, was the head gamekeeper still; the eldest son had been trained in the stables at the Hall, and was coachman now, as the aged Jenks had retired; the second was under his father, the third worked at the Hall, and Benjamin, who had grown up in rather unsettled ways (being the youngest he had been a spoilt child, it was said), had now let himself as farm-man in the house at the Grange. Mr. Burton was pleased to have the son of a family so respectable, and said if the young man were steady, and willing to learn, he would do his part to help him on in the work that belonged to a farm. Crossing the stile, he stood before Benjamin Tovel, and said, 'I think you are the travelling man whose dog saved the child at the Grange?'

'Yes,' replied Benjamin Tovel. 'Is it well with the child?'

'Well enough,' answered the man; 'they say she is getting all right as fast as she can, and if you please you must come now with me: we were hunting you up in all places last night.'

'Did you look in the meadow by the river?' asked the blind man, wishing to know whether other help would have come, or whether, as he believed, they owed their preservation to Jem and his dog.

'No,' said the man; 'we never thought you would be there. No one knew you were blind, nor the dog spent

like that. Both my master and mistress were terribly cut up when they heard about it. They sent me off here; master said I was to take you all back with me, and he would see to the dog.'

Patience had come to the door, hearing a man talking there, and little Sue clung to her hand.

'Take back my best duty and humble thanks to your master,' said Benjamin Tovel, 'and say I am thankful to God for the saved life of his child; and we were found by friends, who have done all for us, and if the dog can walk by to-morrow I hope to reach home.'

'You don't mean to say you are not going with me?'

'I have set my face for home,' said Benjamin Tovel, 'and I cannot turn back again on my way.'

'Think better of it,' said the man; 'you will anger my master, and that will be to your hurt, for of course he means a reward! Why, you might make your fortune! I heard him say he would give any price for that dog, and they do say he is the richest of all the farming gentry of the county.'

'Riches are of little use to me,' said the blind man, 'and no money could tempt me to part with the dog.'

'Well, I should say of all folks a blind man ought not to stand in his own light!'

This was said in a tone that kindled the displeasure of Patience. She now spoke, saying, 'I can have no uncivil words given here. If you have the feeling of a man, you will be ashamed of those you have now spoken.'

'Be not angry for my sake!' said the blind man. 'See ye not that the poor lad has never felt misfortune?'

God shield him from trouble and the hard words it brings !'

'There, don't say a word more,' said the young man, in a very different tone; 'I am sorry I spoke so, if you will believe me, and I'll do all that ever I can if you will come back with me. I promise I will,' he said, looking at Patience. 'You see if you don't, master will think it's my fault.'


'It's no use your persuading,' said Patience, kindly; 'you may see that firm word never changes! My husband found them, and will not give them up while they can bide with us; and if the dog isn't quiet it may go bad with him yet.'

'May I just have a look at him?' asked the young man. 'I never saw such a leap as he gave, right into the middle of the stream, and how bravely he bore down when we cheered him on! I was sent about here and there for the doctor, who never can be found when he's wanted the most, or I should have gone after them, you may be sure.' Then turning to Benjamin Tovel, he said,—

'Well, good day, master, then. Give me a shake of your hand if I must go back alone.'

'God bless you!' said the blind man. And the young man turned away with a deeper feeling than he had had for long.

After this Benjamin Tovel came within doors, and sat again in old Willy's arm-chair, turned by Patience to meet the pleasant air from the door, where a chaffinch and robin hopped freely about, the children scattering crumbs: their shout of joy was music itself, as the song of a bird; and to little Sue, used to town sights, all this



gladness of village life constrained her to look on in silent delight.

The two children now went to their morning sleep.

'I keep them to that,' Patience said; 'it saves them from tire and the cross ways that come with it, and so helps their temper from getting fretted, I find.'

Sue was now busy with the little books on her knee, and Benjamin Tovel and Patience fell into discourse. They had both trodden the pathway of trial, and eaten the bread of affliction; they had both been tried in that furnace that purifies the gold of true faith from the dross that dims its pure lustre. They both knew and loved the Hand that they leaned on, and felt their only dependence to be on its heavenly grace. They held such discourse as Patience could never have with any one except her mistress, Mrs. Smith of the Farm. Not but what Jem was one of the best of husbands, and kindest-hearted of men, and he had a principle above this world; but life had always been a pleasant pathway of well-requited labour for him. He had wept for his dear aged mother, and again for his child, little Peace, but he had never known adversity—the long pressure of that 'heavy Hand,' of which the Psalmist speaks, which does not break the spirit, but bows it down in humble submission and lowly waiting on God, while it is softened into tenderness not of this earth by the all-consoling love that such trial needs. Patience and Jem were both happy as could be in the blessing of their home, but the one far in advance of the other in the life divine, because more deeply taught in the school of that Divine Master, of whom it has been said, 'He never yet turned a bad scholar out of His school.' Yet both had

learned according to the ability given, and the Providence educating both ; they were alike happy in a higher life than their own, and blessed in the hope that reveals heaven as the final home of each one led by love divine here.

But now another visitor stepped over the stile, William Smith, from the farm. As he came in at the open door he looked with a kindly recognition at little Sue, and said,—

‘ So it is as I thought, my friends from the town ! Mr. Tovel, your dog is all the talk of the country. What a good providence it was that led you that way ! ’

‘ We did come in the new boots and socks too,’ said little Sue, looking down at her feet ; ‘ and they be all tidy still.’

William smiled at Patience, who, having heard the story, now guessed all at once ; then, taking the hand of the blind man, he said,—

‘ You are happy, my good friend, to have been the means of saving the life of that little child. Why, I did not think my next call would have been on you here ; you know I promised not to make it a long day ! ’

‘ No, sir ; I always turned off short of this village in my rounds, but it seems I was to blame in slighting it so ! And again that long-forgotten smile passed over the face of the blind man.

‘ I think so,’ said William. ‘ But you have come in earnest now, to wake us all up to hear all we can. They say our shepherd Jem saved you last night in the fog.’

‘ They say true, then. We must all have perished there, if it had not been for him and his dog ! ’

‘There are some people,’ said William, ‘who always seem at hand when they are wanted, and Jem’s been one of that sort ever since I have known him.’

‘The greater comfort for him,’ said Patience; ‘I am sure he thinks so.’

Then William stooped to notice the dog.

‘We heard of it last night,’ he said: ‘Michael called round by us on his way home; he seemed too full of it all to wait the next day. I was for running down here at once, you may be sure, but mother said, “Now just let well alone, if you can: the dog can never do better if Patience has him in hand; don’t you interfere.” I sat down like a good child, as I always do for my mother, but I said, I only thought you might stand in want of some help. Mother answered to that, “You know very well Patience can do more without help than other people can with it.” For when my mother has a good opinion of any one, she always will believe all the world must hold with her. However, it was quite another thing when she found I was coming to-day. She went to her larder and put up these bones, for she said you might not have bones, and if he could eat to-day there was nothing so strengthening. Look here, you brave old fellow,’ said William to the dog, unfolding his parcel. Sharp knew, far off, the scent of a bone, and wagged his tail when a bone, too well covered with meat for any but a dog so heroic, came in sight. But when given him he laid it down, and turned away; he could not eat it. ‘Never mind,’ said William, ‘he will try at it to-morrow; I see he is coming round, there is notice in his eye.’

‘Will you come and see my mother?’ said William to

the child. 'I have a sister at home who will be so kind to you!'

Little Sue took fast hold of Patience's gown, then curtsied, and said, 'No, thank you.'

William laughed, and rose to go, saying,—

'Oh, Patience, 'tis the old story still,—you steal all the children.'

CHAPTER XIII.

‘SHALL I bring old Nep in?’ said Jem, as he opened his cottage door on his return in the evening.

‘No, you had better not,’ answered Patience. ‘The dog is weakly still, and it might put him about to have our dog let in.’

So they sat down to supper, again; the same quiet party, only each felt more at home with the others than they had done the evening before. Just as supper was over Michael looked in and asked, ‘How does the dog do to-day?’

‘He picks up good tightly,’ said Jem, ‘and will be pert by to-morrow. My missus keeps him quiet; that’s her way with sick folk.’

‘How sensible he looks, don’t he?’ said Michael; ‘he turned an eye upon me all the same as a friend. Do you hold pretty middling, sir?’ he asked of Benjamin Tovel; ‘and the little lass sprightly again? How my master did take on last night to be sure; when he heard of you perishing there in the fog, he turned almost as white as he did by the river! He was summoned for a jury to-day, but he said he should send off the first thing this morning for you, and my mistress laid it to heart that you wouldn’t go. My master wasn’t home when I came away. Now, I declare, that dog remembers my rubs of his wet

coat yester-evening ; he has laid him down on his side, and is looking on me as if he thought I was made for nothing else but a rubber. Here, mother, just hand me the flannel again.'

'It hangs on the copper-hole,' said Patience ; 'but, Michael, 'tis your night-school to-day.'

'Didn't I just know you would say that? and if you hadn't, I would. But could I stand out against the dog when he wanted me first? Now, old boy, I can only rub one five minutes by the clock. We are going to read the chapter this evening on Daniel in the den. We are all upon the beasts in the Bible just now, and a talk upon lions is to turn up to-night, with some pictures to set the thing out. I am sure they seem beasts better known far off than nigh ; to go scrunch in their jaws, what a terrible thing! If I ever had to live out in foreign parts where they bide, I should wish for this brave old dog out and out with me there. I believe he would never be daunted, leastways for you, sir,' said the lad, looking up at Benjamin Tovel.

'I am sure he would stand by you to the last, and by any under this roof,' answered Benjamin Tovel; 'for I never knew him forget a kindness. But I could wish you a better friend to deliver you out of the mouth of the lion, even the Angel that redeems from all evil.'

'I dearly wish it, too,' answered Michael the plough-boy ; 'that's half the meaning why I am always in here, for I truly believe that He bides in this house. There, mother, I am true to my word, I have hung up the rubber; I wish I had not to go, though ;' and the door shut on Michael, as he left the bright cottage hearth, and went

into the darkness singing a carol, and made good speed to the night-school and the 'talk upon lions.'

'He is a poor friendless lad,' said Jem; 'he hired himself as a ploughboy to the Grange, but he lodges in this parish. He used to seem a dull, moping sort of a fellow; but my missus went after seeing to him when he was ill, for the people where he lodges don't think twice upon any one, and since then he is quite another lad: he goes regular to church and the night-school, and gets thoughtful ways for all he is so spirity as you see him now. I said to him one day that I thought they must have physicked his mind and body too, and he said, "Well, as for that, you may believe me there's no physic like a good, kind heart that cares for you!" He will always call her 'mother,' and minds her least word like a child; and, if it comes to that, I don't know who doesn't, for with all those quiet ways she is a wonder of a woman for ruling over any.'

The discourse was broken in upon by a loud rap on the door. The blind man started, Sharp gave a half-uttered bark, very expressive of what might follow if occasion required, while Nep without doors made a furious uproar, which proved that the step was that of a stranger. Patience hastened in from the back-kitchen, where she was clearing away, and Jem opened the door. A fine, broad-shouldered yeoman walked in, Farmer Burton of the Grange.

'It is late for a call,' he said, as he entered, 'and disturbing you, I fear; but I only found on my return home that my good friend I see here had not returned with my man. What! is this the dog?'

Sharp had risen on his feet, and now, as Farmer Burton sat down on Jem's vacant chair, the dog came up to inspect him, little aware that he himself was the object of interest and attention. Very thin and weak the poor dog still looked, and he walked like one strained in every limb. Farmer Burton patted the dog in silence, then took out a large, red silk pocket-handkerchief, and burst into tears. Benjamin Tovel heard the sob of the strong man, and his heart melted within him; he felt how dear to that father was the life of that child, dear as his own little Sue's was to him, and, touched with the electric cord of deep sympathy, his own tears found way. Little Sue went to her father's knee and looked up at him in wondering surprise; had the little child been drowned she would have seen reason for crying, but finding no explanation, she found her father's tears, tears rarely shed now, sufficient reason for hers, and cried too. Jem turned and looked out of the window, though, the night being dark, there was nothing to see. Patience only, used from her childhood to repress all emotion, stood calm and quiet, as it was her wont to be. Sharp looked all round in serious concern, little aware that it had been the sight of himself that first opened the springs of sympathy and tears.

Patience drew little Sue to her, the child's past excitement had left her painfully sensitive. Patience feared for her, and said gently, 'We are not going to cry. It was seeing poor Sharp made the gentleman think of his dear little child; we shall hear about her presently: won't you like to hear?' Little Sue answered 'Yes.' And the low, quiet words of Patience, were heard alike by all, and they shed composure around. Farmer Burton rose from

his seat, stroked Sue's curly head, and said, 'I'm glad to be here amongst you all. I came on without waiting when I found you were not at the Grange.'

Patience hearing this took little Sue with her, and hastened into her little cellar, drew a cork of her home-made wine, put some of her plain home-made harvest cake on a plate, and she, with little Sue at her side, brought them in to Mr. Burton, saying, 'You must stand in need of some food, sir; will you please take of this?'

'Thank you, I am sure,' said Mr. Burton, and he gladly partook, ate and drank, and was refreshed, for he had driven on without food. 'I am sure,' he said, 'these good friends have done my part for you all, and done it better than I could, by what I can see. I don't wonder you were against leaving them. I owe them at least as great a debt as you can, for if you had perished that night by the river I am afraid I should never have held up my head again.'

'Well, sir, it was the same good hand of our God upon us, that ordered life for your child and safety for us. What, does she mend nicely? as well as you could think for?'

'Yes, better than any could suppose, so far gone as she was; her life hung in doubt until we almost gave up hope, and it was this anxiety kept us so long unmindful of you.'

'I think, sir,' said Jem, 'it was all ordered for the best; for the dog would soon have been gone if he had not had all attention to bring life back again. And what with the child, and your care for her, which must needs have stood first, I think the dog would have been lost if he had not been here.'

'I fear so,' said Farmer Burton, 'and must be always thankful to you for doing what I perhaps could not have done ; but now I must have them up to the Grange.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Benjamin Tovel ; 'it is no will to stand out against your kindness in asking, but I must turn for home.'

'You can turn your face for home as easily from the Grange as from here. We will forward you anywhere.'

'It is not the miles I dread, sir, but the changes that come. They have been great for me and my child, and we not being over-strong it is more than the mind can well carry. This blessed roof has saved us, and when we go hence I crave after home.'

'When you go, then, you must let me know, and my man shall drive you all home in the light cart.'

'Thank you, sir, the same, but we shall take the road easy. The dog will travel our pace. I doubt the ride suiting the child. If you please, sir, we will just keep our own quiet ways, for they call no notice from any ; and we be all built up bravely by the kind cheer we have here.'

'You refuse all I ask,' said Farmer Burton, 'and what can I say to my wife ? She is bent upon seeing you.'

'I hope no offence, sir ; I am sure I mean none, for you have behaved like a gentleman in such kind offers to us ; but if the lady should be any day in the town, and would condescend to call upon us, we should feel it a great favour. We live in Ivy Lane, the lower end house, with a basket hung out ; and you will please make my humblest duty to the lady, sir, and say, that while the blind man lives on earth he will daily pray that the blessing of the

Almighty may rest on the child, to guard her from all evil, and to fill her life with "His love."

'Well, my friend, I shall remember your words, and often tell my poor little darling of the prayer you are so good as to say you shall offer for her. I am sure life needs prayer, with such unforeseen evils.'

'And such unforeseen blessings, too, sir, we may as truly say. The comfort of this house has been far more to us, I am sure, than the short misery we were in, in the damp river-fog; and you may yet live to find that the dear child's after-life gathers its deepest blessing out of the dark river-bed.'

'How so?' asked Mr. Burton.

'By its minding her, sir, of the love of Him who preserved her; for sure we cannot say, let the means be what they might, but that they were under the control of Him who brought them to bear; and if she do but grow up to feel that, why, then, she will be thinking how best to order her life in all things to please Him, and that is holiness; and you know, sir, 'tis written, "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."'

'Well I can't say I have ever understood these things, but I thought holiness was to be better than your neighbours, and I felt shy of that.'

'No, sir, holiness lies in the spirit of a man, and has its concernment with God, to do all things unto Him, and fashioned after His will. And, for certain, he that has most of this will be the lowest in his own eyes, for he will see how far off he is from the thing that he strives after.'

'I wish we could hold this discourse longer,' said

Farmer Burton, 'but the night draws on apace. Did you say you were a basket-maker by trade?'

'Yes, sir. Sue, show the gentleman one. My work is strong, and I don't hear but what it wears well. If the lady should be wanting any I should count it a favour to serve her.'

Little Sue had lost sight of the baskets for the first time in her life, but Patience fetched them quickly, and took them one from another.

'Good work, I can see,' said Farmer Burton, 'and will just please my wife; are these what you had with you that night by the river?'

'Yes, sir; I have not been about to sell any since.'

'Then let me take them all; what is the price? my wife will set store by them, you may be sure.'

'I can sell you two, sir, and be thankful; I did want the third; they are all alike, and the price alike—half-a-crown.'

The price was paid down, five shillings for the two, and little Sue's eyes glistened with pleasure. Well she knew what it was to her father to sell at a fair price the work he had toiled on.

'Good-night then, my friend; God bless and preserve you! You must take this little offering from me. I could not offer to buy the dog, for that would be robbing you of a friend money could not replace; but this will help you to keep him and your child, too, I hope;' and Mr. Burton put a purse into the hand of Benjamin Tovel.

'There be no thanks nor reward due to me, sir,' said Benjamin Tovel; 'tis the merciful Creator gives the

creatures their nature ; but I humbly thank you for your bounty to me, and may He, who is able, reward and repay you !’

Sweet was the evening worship beneath that lowly roof, where those, so lately unknown to each other, met united in heart, and true friends for the future.

When little Sue was brought downstairs by Patience, ready for her little bed on the floor by her father, and laid there and asleep, Benjamin Tovel put the purse on the table given him by Mr. Burton. ‘I don’t know what is in it,’ he said ; ‘tis a rich gift, I fear : but the least I can do is to share it with you. You truly saved us, and a great deliverance it was !’

‘Not a farthing,’ said Jem ; ‘this is no inn for you, but the house of a friend, where you must come whenever you will, and always be welcome.’

‘Nay, master,’ said the blind man, ‘believe me the half would be sweeter if I had shared it with you. Don’t I owe you the life of my child, and my dog, and my own life too ?’

‘And sure,’ said Jem, ‘you can’t grudge us the blessing of that ! There, never say a word more on such matters as these. Why, you have brought my wife to crying who never will shed a tear. I often wish, for my part, when troubles are on us, which is seldom enough, she would fall a-crying, for I think that quiet way wears out the strength more, and I never do know how to comfort those still troubles within, they get the master of me ; I like a good cry that brings it all out.’

Patience once overcome could not readily recover, and slipped away to her chamber.

'She's gone off,' said Jem; 'tis your going she takes on about. She is so wonderful fond of the child, it minds her of the one we have lost. But she is that fond of you all that I shall have enough to do to keep her spirit up, I can see, when you are gone.'

'I am afraid,' said the blind man, 'if I did bide here for long I should be sore loth to go, and my little Sue too. It will come back to me now like a heavenly dream. Would you just be so good as to keep that one basket for her, with the love and the blessing of the blind man and his poor little child? I had it with me when you saved us from the brink of the river; it will mind her of that, and she will find the work good.'

'I will,' said Jem; 'it will be something to give her when I have to cheer her up for the parting with you. But you must stay one day longer, the dog cannot walk till he has fed better.'

'I will then,' said Benjamin Tovel, 'for your goodness kindles a wonderful comfort on my darkened way, though I may say 'tis only earth lies in shade.'

When the poor women came the next morning to buy milk, as they did daily, for the milk of the fine cow, Mrs. Smith's gift to Patience, was in great request, they each one begged just to see the dog, for they had heard by this time of all that had passed. Patience let them step in, and saw their motherly looks on little Sue, and sympathy for her blind father; then they turned away, greatly satisfied at having seen the dog, and the poor man and the child. Sharp, too, was recovering, and did not turn from his good supply of bones. William Smith looked in again, and was surprised at the greater spirit about the dog

altogether. But happy hours will fly swiftly; they have something in them of Heaven, where they say that time is not, because its soft wing flies unnoted by all; while sorrow hangs its chain on the swift-footed hours, and makes each moment reckoned by the weight that it bears. So the next morning came at last, and Jem said his heartfelt farewell, and bade them come on their next journey and lodge with them and sell baskets round there. Sharp seemed to understand when Jem wished him well. Nep looked the same wish from under his shaggy brows; he had been allowed the last day to come in when Jem returned in the evening, and showed no ill-will to the stranger dog, but appeared to remember all that had passed; and little Sue, to the joy of her young, grateful heart, was allowed to give 'the big dog that did save we,' for so she described him, some of her own bread and milk. She had first fed Sharp, by direction from Patience, that he might not be troubled at her notice of another; but Sharp knew the dog that had been their deliverer, and showed no displeasure at little Sue's grateful attentions to him.

And now breakfast was over. The blind basket-maker had no load to bear, one hand for his child and one for the dog who stood ready. It was plain that little Sue had a full heart at leaving. Patience made her go home in the little garments she had put her on, and the child said, 'How glad Mammy Garson will be, and Sammy, and Rachel, these clothes be so tidy! And when daddy is quite hungry or tired we will come back again, because there is no work to do here, and a warm fire, and plenty food.' And when the last leave had been taken and the travellers were out at the stile, little Sue turned back again, and

throwing her arms round the neck of that motherly woman, said, 'Mammy—Patience!' and then turned again with her little hand in her father's, and so they passed away. The child had stopped for a moment between the two words, not in the same instant remembering the second: said in this way they bore an unthought-of meaning to Patience; it was as if the child had said at parting, 'Mammy, patience!' She could not tell why she felt so much at parting with them, and especially the child; it was, no doubt, in part, that she stood in the vacant place left by little Peace, and had such sweetness in all her looks and words and ways that it soothed the mother's heart; but it was also a love for the child herself, and little Sue was worthy of the place she had won. But when Patience thought of her, missed her little presence and longed for her near, or feared for her in Ivy Lane, with none beside her blind father and Sharp in the house where she dwelt, she heard again the dear tones of the clinging child, saying, 'Mammy, patience.' Or when she felt disposed to mourn for her own first-born child, she heard again, 'Mammy, patience,' and felt how blessed the reunion one day with both children would be. Or when troubles rose to vex her, which yet was but seldom, for Patience had known real trouble in life, and did not vex at trifles nor think little things great; yet when they did come, she still heard the last words of that little voice when the child turned to her again and said, 'Mammy, patience.'

It was a long walk for one day, and Patience had feared it for them; but the blind man would have his way, and no doubt he was right. The road, too, seemed longer for having no baskets to sell on the way, no houses to call

at or customers to see. They had to rest several times, and to take of the good food packed up by Patience, while Sharp ate with appetite a bone from Mrs. Smith's larder. At length they entered Ivy Lane, and stopped at Widow Garson's, where the key was always kept. She made them all come in, and, seeing their tired looks, hastened and got ready tea, and made a bright fire, for she said, 'There was nothing like warmth for taking out tire.' And she said, 'Now don't speak a word until you are a bit rested.' The tea was refreshing, and bread and milk to little Sue. Poor Widow Garson could use hospitality now! There was, indeed, much to tell, far more than one evening could unfold; and the tale of the child saved by the dog awakened Widow Garson's deepest feeling. As soon as tea was over Widow Garson sent Rachel to open the house, and light up a good fire that it might not strike cold, and see all ready for the night against the tired travellers went in. Little Sue sat by Sammy on their small stools by the fire, where Smut purred in content at the return of absent friends, and poor Sharp lay enjoying the rest and the warmth. Then Benjamin Tovel told Widow Garson of the rich man's kind gift, which he had not mentioned before, and she rejoiced with him with a joy words could not express, for none knew their poverty better than she. And he asked her to take one sovereign in charge—there were five in the purse. Poor Widow Garson had long laid out his small earnings for him. She made them go, he said, twice as far as he could: and now he asked her not to spend much, only what might help to strengthen the child and the dog, for he did wish to lay up what he could against illness of his own, that there

might be support for the child, lest the workhouse should have to receive and part them again. Widow Garson well understood this feeling, and said she would make all spare that she could. 'Only now,' said Benjamin Tovel, 'it will lighten life that you can all come in sometimes, and share a fire-side and a cheerful meal with us.'

And when, alone with his child in his own little room, he laid up his purse, he felt the joy of gold for her sake, and thought that on better food she now might grow strong and hearty, and he cease to fear for her, and that he might perhaps be able to lean on her, and feel the support when age came upon him, instead of having to tend her frail little life, as now, with such care.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. MANSFIELD had now a large, cheerful family, all brought up at the house of business—the large, attractive-looking grocer's shop. There were other grocers' shops in the town that made more show than this ; but to all, both rich and poor, who knew it by dealing there, Mr. Mansfield's shop had a look of pleasant assurance that the best goods would be served there, at honest prices, and all business done in the best possible way. Two sons now served in the shop ; and the excellent foreman with the large family, being no longer wanted, had, with Mr. Mansfield's assistance and encouragement, opened a small shop in another part of the town. The two sons who now served in the shop had their father's pleasant manner, for their parents had trained them to make it their pleasure to do what they did well, and in those obliging and punctual habits which are approved by all.

If, on a market-day, you wished to see the largest gathering of countrywomen in any one place, except the large market itself, you would find it in Mr. Mansfield's shop ; and if you wanted any one poor woman in particular, you were most likely to hear of her there. Mr. Mansfield knew the names of almost all his customers, and felt an interest about them. It was surprising how soon he learned to know the family history of each. You

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might have heard him inquire of one poor woman how the old people were?— This was a bed-ridden mother and an aged father by the chimney-corner, and sometimes a little tea was sent as a gift to them. Of another, how the little boy Tommy was? and you found that Tommy had been ill for some time, and sometimes a little bit of sugar-candy was screwed up for Tommy. Of another, how the poor neighbour was with the broken leg? And you wondered how Mr. Mansfield could carry in his mind the circumstances of the poor all the country round. But it was not in his mind so much as on his heart that their names and necessities were written; and he had a very large heart, large by nature, and its sympathies were expanding and increasing in power every year.

On market-day, Mrs. Mansfield always held herself in readiness for any poor people whom her husband might send round to call in upon her from the shop. Many a want was cheered or relieved by Mrs. Mansfield's sympathy, aid, or good advice. In the quickly changing dress of the poor women of the present day, it is a pleasure to remember those you might see stepping in or out of Mr. Mansfield's shop. The old women in their little close-fitting bonnets of black, with short gowns of gay print, and small shawls neatly pinned in summer, or red cloaks in winter; the younger women in their shading bonnets of calico, with the clean lilac print gown and white apron.

Behind the particular counter where Mr. Mansfield generally stood, there was one little shelf with a green curtain before it; but all the poor women knew what lay hidden there—a little assortment of small books, and cards on which one of his sons, who was clever with his

pen, had written in printing letters a text of Holy Scripture, or a short prayer; for the printed cards were not scattered then. And when Mr. Mansfield heard of any one sick, or laid up with accident or some special cause, then he would draw back the little green curtain and take a book or a card from his store; indeed, on market-days it was for the most part kept undrawn. Encouraged by this, the poor women made bold to tell to their town friend all the ills that happened around them; and Mr. Mansfield, fast tied to his shop as he was, became notwithstanding a missionary, sending comfort and instruction to many whom he never saw. This little green-curtained shelf was a great attraction to Mr. Mansfield's end of the shop; the largest gathering of the poor people was always waiting there. But they said, if it had not been for the bits of comfortable books that lay backward there, they would full as soon have been served by Master Joshua, or James, as by the old gentleman himself.

Jane had grown up into a pleasant woman, with all the kindly thoughts for others she might be expected to have. Her father had given her a good education; and her parents thought it best that she should not spend her youth in such occupations as might please her own taste, but turn her ability, both natural and acquired, to useful account in behalf of others. Jane had also younger sisters, who would be made more useful at home if Jane were not always by as their mother's right hand. In compliance with these reasons, she first undertook an engagement as daily governess in the town. This lasted two years, with great satisfaction to all; at the end of which time, the finishing course she had been desired to give her pupils

was considered complete, and Jane Mansfield was at leisure again.

In the Midsummer before the time of which we are now writing another engagement was offered to Jane. This was a long journey from her home, in the neighbourhood of a manufacturing town ; but being very much pressed by her friends to accept it, her parents consented, and Jane was quite willing to enter upon it. She found herself in a large house, a little way outside the manufacturing town. There were only two children, a girl and a boy, and they were both to be under her care. On her first interview, the lady who had engaged her said, ' Now, Miss Mansfield, you must do your own work, remember, and not throw the burden on me. I am tired out with the complaints of governesses : the first thing they do is to bring their troubles to me. I hope, from what I have heard of you, that you understand the work you have undertaken ; for mine are clever children, and such always want their own way.'

Jane Mansfield listened in silence, as one receiving instructions, merely saying at the conclusion that she would do her best, and hoped to be successful ; but, though she did not say so, she could not agree in the lady's conclusions, that because her children were clever, therefore they wanted their own way. She feared it was a proof that they were spoilt and self-willed, rather than any proof that they were naturally clever. They were gone to bed on her arrival, so she did not see them until the next morning.

At breakfast-time a gentle-looking little girl, of eight years old, came into the school-room, and a rosy-faced

boy, between six and seven : they stared at their new governess, but took no other notice of her.

‘Are you ready for your breakfast?’ Miss Mansfield asked ; and they came to the table, where a rather dreary confusion of all things soon took place. Miss Mansfield took no notice of this, but went on quietly with all that seemed to be required ; until at length she said,—

‘I never breakfasted before in this county, and so I have not seen the habits that prevail here. You will have to teach me your way; and then some day, if you like, I can show you the way in which people breakfast in my county.’

‘How do they breakfast?’ said Charley.

‘I cannot tell you until I have learned your way,’ she replied ; ‘and then, when I go back to my county, I can show the people there how gentlemen and ladies breakfast where I have been.’

‘Gentlemen and ladies don’t breakfast so,’ said Charley ; ‘only we.’

‘Are not you a gentleman, then?’ asked Miss Mansfield : ‘I thought you were. The young sons of gentlemen in my county are gentlemen themselves.’

Charley looked at his sister and laughed.

‘Never mind,’ said Miss Mansfield, ‘I shall learn by degrees, and then I can show every one wherever I go.’

Now breakfast was over, and the school-room was cleared for lessons.

‘I don’t mean to do any lessons this morning,’ said Charley.

‘Nor I neither,’ said Edith.

‘Shall you tell mamma?’ asked Charley.

‘What should I tell your mamma?’ inquired Miss Mansfield.

‘That we don’t mean to do any lessons,’ replied Charley.

‘Do you think it would give her any pleasure if I did?’

‘Mamma wouldn’t mind,’ said Charley: ‘she would only say, “Don’t trouble me!”’

‘Then we had better mind what she says—don’t you think so?’ asked Miss Mansfield. ‘I think we had better not tell her anything, until we can tell her something that will be a pleasure.’

‘I don’t think anything is much pleasure to mamma,’ said Edith: ‘she is always tired, or afraid of a noise, or distracted in her head, if we run and play.’

‘Then I think we had better play where she won’t hear us: don’t you think so?’

‘Can you play?’ asked Charley.

‘Yes, I can play a great many games that children who are gentlemen and ladies play in my county: but, you see, you will have to teach me your way.’

‘Can you play “Cross questions and crooked answers,” and “Hunt the slipper,” and “Tom Tiddler’s ground,” and “Fox and goose,” and “Blindman’s buff?”’ asked Charley.

‘Yes, I can play all those, and a great many more; and we can play at one of them every evening, if you like, and we can find a place where we shall not distress your mamma. What a beautiful morning it is! I can see the butterfly dancing over the lawns and sipping the sweet flowers. Don’t you think we had better take a charming walk, and you show me where you like best to go?’

‘Yes!’ said Edith; ‘Yes!’ said Charley, a little surprised. ‘You are not like our other governesses: they were always saying, “Lessons first! Lessons first!”’

‘I have a great respect for all good books,’ said Miss Mansfield: ‘I cannot put a book into any one’s hand who would not value the use of it. Shall I put on my things, and we take this pleasant walk now?’

‘Yes!’ said the children, and they ran to prepare.

The walk was a charming one, for Miss Mansfield had loved reading from a child, and had stored her memory with the history of insects, birds, and animals, with many tales of them; and whenever the children were tired she sat down with them beside her. In this way the walk lingered on, and they were not home in more than time to prepare for the one-o’clock dinner.

‘Miss Mansfield, I mean to sit by you,’ said Edith.

‘And so do I too,’ said Charley.

‘Do the people in your county eat their dinners in the same way in which they eat their breakfast?’ inquired Miss Mansfield.

‘Oh, no! quite different! That was only Charley and me,’ said Edith.

Mrs. Collins looked very much surprised at seeing the children hastening to arrange to have Miss Mansfield between them: they looked also blooming and happy, and were very hungry.

‘My dear children, I cannot have you eat so much! Miss Mansfield, will you see to that?’

‘Shall I help you, and show you how it is done in my county?’ asked Miss Mansfield.

‘Yes,’ said Charley; and the confusion ended.

After lunch the children went off with Miss Mansfield, to their mamma's surprise and satisfaction. They showed their new governess everything. On visiting the poultry-yard, Miss Mansfield suggested that they should each choose one of the birds under coops as their own, and gather up all the crumbs at breakfast and come and feed it. With some difficulty they each at length made a choice ; and then two plates were kept, one for each, into which the crumbs were put as soon as made, and the table by degrees became very neat.

The first afternoon, when all the sight-seeing and showing was over, Miss Mansfield proposed that they should all make little sofas and rest, for they were all very tired, and she read to them some tales of kings and queens which greatly interested them. After tea she brought out a little pink frock, very pretty, and asked Edith if she would like to do a little piece every day, until she had made it, and then she could have it for her own, and give it to the first dear little cottage child they might find who might want it. Edith agreed. And Charley was pleased to colour some pictures by her side, with her to direct and take interest in all. In this way they lived for a week, she making holiday with them ; though more was learned by the children of useful knowledge in that week, than in months of ceaseless opposition before.

But Miss Mansfield knew there was no royal road to learning, that application and labour must come at last. But by this happy companionship for a few days she had won the confidence and the affections of the children, and learned their dispositions and tastes. They also found her companionship in all things a charm against the weariness

and disputes that spoiled each day before ; and she felt they would not very readily give up her presence now.

At the end of a week, Miss Mansfield proposed they should make a plan for the day ; they should all think it over, arrange it, and she would write it down, and they would each sign their names that it might hold good. There was a whole evening's consultation over this important plan. Charley wished all the lessons left out that he did not like, but Miss Mansfield proposed that they should all be admitted, but each one allowed only one half-hour ; it would be satisfaction to have done them, and this could tire no one. So the plan was completed at length, signed by each, and the next day it was to begin its regulation of life. Miss Mansfield laid her watch on the table, that they might keep true time. The first lessons went off smoothly, some of them were so pleasant, as done with Miss Mansfield, that the children wished them not to end with the half-hour, but Miss Mansfield said, ' We cannot break our agreement, we must leave off now ! ' Then came Charley's sum ; Charley had a great objection to any and every arrangement of figures, and when the half-hour ended the sum was not done.

' We cannot finish it now,' said Miss Mansfield ; ' this is the first half-hour we have wasted to-day.'

' Have I wasted any yet, Miss Mansfield ? ' asked Edith.

' No, not one yet, and you will see Charley will not to-morrow ; he is a little boy, younger than you, so it was not to be expected he should conquer at first.'

The children found that the lesson was always put away according to the agreement at the half-hour's end,

whether done or undone, and it was much more pleasant to have the feeling it was done, which proved an incentive to trying. And as no lesson ever lingered on they did not get weary, but felt the freshness of change.

At length, one day Charley was sadly out of humour, he had failed in his first lesson and would not try the next: he wished to pass it over, and take one he liked better. Miss Mansfield said, 'No, I cannot break the agreement; we all made it together, and we must all keep it together.'

'I don't care about it,' said Charley, 'and I don't mean to keep it any more.'

'That would not be honourable,' said Miss Mansfield.

'I don't care,' said Charley; 'I won't keep it any more!'

'Then,' said Miss Mansfield, 'if you are too much of a little boy to understand about keeping an agreement, you must learn to mind what is said to you, and do it because I tell you.'

'I shall learn what I like, and when I like,' said Charley.

'Well, my dear boy, I cannot make you obedient, if you do not love it for its own sake. Now I must attend to Edith.'

But Edith soon followed in Charley's disobedience, and did not wish to do her lesson.

'Then you must both find your own employment until school hours are over,' said Miss Mansfield.

'Oh, Charley,' said Edith, 'Miss Mansfield says we may do what we like!'

'No, dear, I did not say you *may* do what you like, but you *must* do what you like, and I am afraid you will find a

great difference between the two.' But the children took out their drawing-paper and paints and began to copy and colour.

'I cannot make this come right—how tiresome! Miss Mansfield, will you just draw that one little hard bit for me?'

'No, Charley, I cannot help you in play, because your work is not done.'

'How disagreeable!' said Charley.

'I can get on alone,' said Edith.

But very soon the paper was messed, and the drawing left in disorder.

'I shall read a story,' said Edith.

'Read it to me,' said Charley.

'Oh no, I cannot; I am so tired!' said Edith.

'Oh dear,' said Charley, looking out of the window, 'what a tiresome long morning this is!'

At length it was twelve o'clock.

'There, Miss Mansfield,' said Edith, 'it is twelve o'clock. Will you come out?'

'Yes,' answered Miss Mansfield, in her pleasant way, 'we have lost our happy morning of work, but we must not lose our walk; let me help you to put all these things away.'

By Miss Mansfield's help the things were all put neatly away, so that when they came out again there might be no traces of that morning's disorder, but all looking fresh. Then they set out on their walk. They had not gone very far before Charley said, 'Let us sit down, I am so tired! and you tell us a story, Miss Mansfield.'

'We will sit down if you like, but I cannot tell a story to-day.'

‘Why not?’

‘Because we have not kept our agreement of work, and a story is play.’

‘You can tell us one about some king out of the English history,’ said Edith; ‘and history is a lesson, not play.’

‘I cannot attend to lessons now,’ said Miss Mansfield; ‘the happy lesson time is all wasted away, and I feel more inclined to cry about a little girl and boy alive now, than to tell of kings who died long ago.’

‘I mean to ask mamma,’ said Charley, ‘if I may not do which lesson I like first, and you will see she will say I may.’

Miss Mansfield made no reply.

At the early dinner Charley took his place by his mamma and said, ‘Mamma, Miss Mansfield will not let me do the lesson I wish first. May I do my lessons in the way I like best?’

‘Yes, my dear; I do not see that it can make any difference which you do first.’

‘Will you tell Miss Mansfield then, mamma, that I may do which I like first, for she will not let me?’

‘Miss Mansfield,’ said Mrs. Collins, ‘Charley wishes to choose the lesson he likes to do first; I see no objection to that.’

‘I can teach no other lesson,’ said Miss Mansfield, gravely and calmly, ‘until obedience is learned.’

‘Well, I must leave you to manage as you best can,’ said Mrs. Collins; ‘if you can teach that, your power exceeds mine!’

‘Now, Miss Mansfield,’ said Charley, in the school-room, ‘mamma says I may do which lesson I like.’

‘ You may do what you like by yourself, Charley, but I cannot teach you anything until you have learned to obey. When you have learned to obey we will change our paper if you like, and put the sums and the reading wherever you wish.’

‘ I don’t wish to put them anywhere,’ said Charley.

‘ Then we must wait, dear,’ said Miss Mansfield.

‘ No, but I cannot wait; I am tired of waiting.’

‘ Then bring me your reading-book, and let us try together, and see how soon the lesson will be done. Do you know what the consequences will be if you do not learn to obey?’

‘ No,’ said Charley, rather interested at the idea of ‘consequences.’

‘ Then I will tell you: if you do not learn to obey you will grow up a poor, lonely, desolate man; no one will mind what you say, and you will have no true friends, and no blessing from God in heaven.’

‘ Then here is the book,’ said Charley: ‘ how long must I read?’

‘ Only one half-hour. Look, here is my watch, and we will read it together.’

After this day there was no more continued contention, but still the reading lesson always proved heavy; even the sums had become a less trouble than this.

Miss Mansfield was often thinking how best to ease the little boy’s trouble in learning to read, when one day, on crossing a common about a mile from the house, they saw a rough-made chair upon wheels at a lone cottage door, and a pale-looking boy in it.

‘ Do you see that little boy? I am afraid he is lame.

Shall we go and speak to him?' said Miss Mansfield. So they went.

'Are you lame, little boy?'

'Yes, I be.'

The mother in the cottage, hearing some one speaking to her child, looked round and said, 'Yes, he fell when an infant; his sister was running with him in her arms; and he is wholly a cripple. His father has made him that chair to get him out of my way a bit; he is a torment within, never content for five minutes together.'

'Can he read?' inquired Miss Mansfield.

'How should he?' said the woman: 'there is never a school within two miles of here, not one for teaching the poor, and neither his father nor I know so much as a letter.'

'Poor little boy!' said Miss Mansfield: 'what could we do for him, Charley? he can never run about as you do, you see, and he looks so unhappy. Don't you think you and I could wheel him as far as that hedge where the blackberries grow, and gather him some?'

'Yes, that I could, alone by myself,' said Charley, and both little hands grasped the chair, and he bent his back for a push.

'I too!' said Edith.

'Go, go!' said the poor little boy.

'Will you trust him a little while with us?' asked Miss Mansfield of his mother.

'Yes, the longer the better,' said his poor mother. 'I often do say I must get him taken into the work-house, for he wears my life out, only his father is always for keeping him here.'

So they set out together, Miss Mansfield between the

two children. The poor little cripple was a very light weight, and they pushed him gently along. When they reached the blackberry-hedge Miss Mansfield pulled down a branch to the chair, and the poor little cripple, for the first time in his life, gathered blackberries himself: his pleasure was extreme, and his hunger seemed great. They stayed as long as possible, the poor little cripple being very unwilling to leave the blackberry-hedge; but at length they were obliged to push him back again to his mother's cottage door.

'What is your name?' Miss Mansfield asked of the little cripple, before they left him at his mother's door.

'Me,' he answered.

'He calls himself "Me,"' said the woman, 'and we get in the way of calling him so; but his name is Meshech.'

'Ask little Me if he would like you to come again,' said Miss Mansfield to Charley.

'Shall I come again?' said Charley.

'Yes, yes,' said little Me.

'Ah, do,' said the poor woman; 'it will be a charity, I can tell you.' And poor little Me looked wistfully after them.

'He did not like to leave the blackberries, did he?' said Edith.

'No,' answered Miss Mansfield. 'I am afraid he was hungry.'

'Why does not his mother give him all the food he wants?' asked Edith.

'Perhaps she is very poor,' answered Miss Mansfield, 'and cannot buy much.'

'I can take him some food next time,' said Charley.

‘ Don’t you think you could teach him to read, Charley ?’

‘ I don’t know about that,’ answered Charley.

‘ Poor little boy!’ said Miss Mansfield, ‘ how tired he must be sitting all day and every day in that chair, and nothing to amuse him ! but if he could read, what a happy boy he might be!’

‘ I can teach him his letters,’ said Charley, ‘ and “ a-b, ab.” I know all that, and more too.’

‘ Suppose, then, we try. Shall we take up that pretty book with pictures to every letter ? You have quite done with that now. It is tumbling to pieces, but we can make a new cover.’

‘ Yes,’ said Charley. ‘ When shall we go ?’

‘ We can go to-morrow, if fine, and take something in a basket for the little boy, and you can give it to him if he tries to learn his letters. Edith and I can have a chair from the cottage, and see about our knitting while you teach Me to read.’

‘ That will be delightful,’ said Edith, ‘ because mamma will not know anything about it if we knit it up there, and you know it is to take her quite by surprise.’

‘ I wish to-morrow were come,’ said Charley. ‘ I wonder how many letters that little boy will learn in a day ? I know them all.’

‘ I think, Charley, you and I must read together a little of an evening, for I fancy that little boy will learn very fast, and I should not like him to find that you could not teach him any more.’

‘ I think we had better,’ said Charley. ‘ I shall soon learn; you will see, he will not get up to me.’

In the evening Charley said to his mother, ‘ Miss

Mansfield and I are going to read a little together, mamma, so I must run away now.'

'I wonder what next!' said Mrs. Collins. 'Miss Mansfield works wonders I never expected to see.'

'Oh, mamma, I can tell you,' said Edith; 'you see you don't know, but there is a poor little lame boy on the common; we pushed him in his little chair to gather blackberries to-day, he was so hungry; and Charley is going to teach him to read.'

'What will that do for his hunger?' said Mrs. Collins; 'you had better take him some food. And as to Charley teaching him to read, it is nonsense, when he cannot read himself.'

'Indeed, mamma, you don't know about it; he is going into two syllables directly, and Miss Mansfield and Charley are going to read together very often, because Miss Mansfield thinks the little lame boy will learn very fast.'

'Your son will turn out a scholar instead of a dunce, after all,' said Mr. Collins to his wife.

'I don't know by what charm Miss Mansfield persuades,' said Mrs. Collins, 'but she works wonders with Charley in more ways than one.'

'And with me too, mamma,' said Edith; 'only you don't know yet, and you are not to know because it is to be a surprise!'

Me was delighted when, on the next visit, the picture-alphabet was produced. He could not at first be persuaded to attend to the letters from delight at finding out some object he knew—an acorn, a cat, or a cow. Miss Mansfield feared for Charley's patience when she heard him say

‘Naughty boy! mind your letters. Now say this—A.’ But poor little Me was too much used to rough words to feel much at hearing them, and, Charley being the first friend he had ever had, he soon began to pay attention to all that he said, and to welcome his visits with eager delight; and Charley’s affectionate heart soon responded to this love, and he grew patient and gentle in the lessons he gave. Edith, too, found that her little pink frock would be just the size for the little black-eyed child, the youngest at home. And the poor mother was cheered by the interest taken in her children, and when the little lame boy shouted ‘Oh, mother, he is coming!’ she would step out to look. Or when the day was wet and Charley could not come, the little lame boy sat within intent on his book, his poor mother wondering that he picked up learning so fast. All this changed the life of the poor crippled boy, and changed the dull look of life for his poor mother too; her voice grew more gentle and kind, and the sunshine of love brightened round little Me.

Charley, too, became a reader, not of words alone, for his heart was wakened up, and the heart helps the head; books found the response of living sympathies in him. Meanwhile Edith knitted on with patient care a winter shawl to surprise her mother, and took all the notice she possibly could of her little cottage friend Meggie. This success had been gained by calling forth an interest in others, instead of the children’s young energies falling back on themselves. Little Me proved an incentive to Charley that no personal indulgence could have been. Self had been surfeited in these children, as it may be feared it is with too many. A new toy would have been

wasted on Charley, who already had an over-abundant supply; but a little friend dependent on him, this was a living interest with a claim always new. The sympathies opened by the little cripple led the children out of themselves into a boundless realm, for who ever reached the limit of Charity's domain?

Jane Mansfield had felt her engagement a very trying one at first, with no power in her own hands except that of influence, and no authority on which to fall back. But she had early learned that it was easier, as well as happier in the end, to overcome difficulties than to yield to them. She knew, too, that it was written, 'Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.' It was fulfilled now to her, and her life became a very happy one, closely entwined with that of the children committed to her care.

CHAPTER XV.

CHRISTMAS came at length, with glowing hearts and glowing hearths to warm old winter's frost-bound brows. With carols, too, and sacred hymns, warbling beneath the sheltering eaves of home in joy more thankful and enduring than that which wakes with leaf and flower the minstrelsy of spring. Christmas came—that midnight hour that hallowed earth for ever, as the human birthplace of Heaven's Eternal King. Well then might earth rejoice, as from adoring hearts the strains breathed forth, 'Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.' When angels sang the advent of the Prince of Peace above the hills of Bethlehem no answering hymns arose; but now the angel hosts may hear from every land the hallelujahs rise, hailing the day that celebrates the Saviour's birth. One gift alike for all, for each; able to fill each heart with the unfailing bliss of heaven.

Constance and Alfred had various hiding-places from which gladness was to break on Christmas morning. It were in vain to try to tell all the plans that were devised, the parcels of many sizes that never could have been

known from one another, if directions had not been bestowed upon them; the wreaths and garlands that were to decorate the room where all the lone old people—those who had none to share their Christmas joy with—were to come and dine with Alfred, Constance, and little Maud; the bright red cloaks, such as Herbert once gave to Widow Jones, one or two of which were given each year; the large gay handkerchiefs to be worn over the old women's shoulders, or little shawls for the same purpose in winter; the warm stockings and white embroidered frocks for the old men; and amongst the most admired of all gifts, the little black silk bonnets made by Mrs. Cox. None were ever like them, so pretty, close-fitting, and so good, with an antique grace of style that no modern milliner could give; only Mrs. Cox, who had waited on the noble presences of a generation now gone by, and knew how to make a thing look worth the wearing in a way none other could.

Patience always had some little Christmas gift from Lady Gertrude's hand, in dear remembrance of that gift of long ago that first brought love and life and hope to the child benumbed in misery; and these gifts were to Patience dear beyond all price. There were also school plans, and thoughts for the sick, that every one upon that day of gladness might rejoice in earthly comfort as well as heavenly peace. That peace, indeed, man cannot make another heart partaker of. We may kindle a smile of earth around those we love; but the peace of God, the peace that Jesus came to give, He only who made the heart can open it to take that blessing in.

Ivy Lane was not forgotten; the attic where Widow

Garson lived, and her children, Rachel and Sammy. Alfred and Constance did not know the blind man and little Sue, and others who lived not far away, who were glad in heavenly thoughts of that Christmas-day; but those they did know they remembered, and this was all that children could do. The parcel was large that was going to Ivy Lane, for there were blankets in it, and a warm shawl for the widow; a little coat, too, for Sammy, and a book for Rachel, with materials for a plum-pudding. The parcel had been tied up in strong brown paper and string by Mrs. Cox and Mercy, and the children were to take it in with Mrs. Brame the day before; but it was not to be opened until Christmas morning. The large parcel was laid in the front of the pony-carriage, under the rejoicing eyes of Constance and Alfred; and as they went in they had many questions to ask of Mrs. Brame, as to the expected effect that the parcel would produce—Whether it would be kept all night in the room where Widow Garson and her children slept, so that they would see it again as soon as they woke? and whether they would know they might open it then? and what they would be likely to say when they did open it? and whether they would open it before they had their breakfast, or after?

Mrs. Brame was bewildered. 'My dears, what questions you do ask! How should I know, unless I had been there? and what in the world can it signify? They will have a good pair of blankets, and other comforts beside, and I am sure that must be enough!'

The groom who was driving them was once the little Johnnie Lambert, Widow Lambert's only child, who watched so long for Snowflake and his lady in the lane.

He was now grown a man, and had been trained in stable-work at the Hall from a boy: he had always done all he could to support his poor widowed mother; she had never wanted food or firing, and always paid her rent with her Johnnie's help. She thought there was not a lad like her Johnnie! and now he was a man grown, and head-groom at the Hall. He heard all the children said to Mrs. Brame, and the questions they asked, and he thought to himself he wished he could have answered, for he could guess pretty well how it all was likely to be; he knew by the feeling of his own dear widowed mother, and the little surprises he liked to get up for her. But as Mrs. Brame was in charge he could not say a word, or did not like to venture. Poor little Constance, quite discouraged, said, 'Oh, Brame, I do wish you could tell!' But little Alfred said, softly, 'Never mind, Consy; let us sit still and 'magine!'

Arrived at Ivy Lane, John the groom ran upstairs with the parcel, while Mrs. Brame, not without some alarm, held Zarepha; but Zarepha was used with her Lady to stop at the homes of the poor, and was much more disposed to wait quietly there than at the gates of the rich. John ran up with the great parcel; he felt glad at its weight: there was no mistaking the room, the one black attic door. John knocked. Rachel opened; and when John went in he took off his hat, as he would on entering the homes of the rich, and he said, 'A parcel, ma'am, from the Hall. Mrs. Brame and my young master and miss are waiting below. Shall I lay it down here?' The table received the large parcel, and John ran downstairs again.

‘We shall not be long,’ said Mrs. Brame to the groom; ‘I know the air will be cold.’

And Mrs. Brame and the children went up the stairs. Sammy was within, for his little boots were out mending, and this pleased Constance and Alfred; they stood by the table while Mrs. Brame said,—

‘My young gentleman and lady have brought you some cheer for Christmas, and I have brought you from my Lady another sovereign for rent.’

Constance and Alfred saw the poor widow receive her sovereign, the rent being only one shilling a-week; this left money each quarter for firing, and kept the widow and the fatherless warm. They saw the eyes that were attracted in surprise to the parcel, saw the thin look of the bed, saw Sammy’s smile of delight and his little hands rubbed together, as he peeped round the table to see another side of the parcel. It was not to be opened until the next morning, which would be Christmas-day; and then Mrs. Brame added,—

‘I think it is coming on cold, almost like a fall of snow, so we must not stay,’ and she wished Mrs. Garson good day. Constance and Alfred cast a lingering look back on the faces that gathered at the open attic door, and a corner of the parcel they had been watching over so long could still be seen by them, when Mrs. Brame said, ‘Now, don’t look behind you; mind where you are going, or you will fall down the stairs.’

On the way home there was a steep hill, at which it was usual for good walkers to alight and climb it on foot. Mrs. Brame conformed to this rule, but would not let the children, lest they should be heated and catch cold in the

chill of the air. The groom kept beside Zarepha with the reins in his hand, and Mrs. Brame walked behind. A poor man, who seemed a village-labourer, was on the road; he had his arm in a sling, and walked slowly up the hill, as if his way had been long. Mrs. Brame's sympathies were now open-eyed, she observed what she saw in a way she did not before. The electric cord had been duly strung between her eye and her heart. She said kindly, 'Have you met with a fall on these frosty days?'

'No,' he answered sorrowfully; 'I broke my arm by a fall from the granary stairs, overbalanced by a sack. I have been in the hospital in the town nine weeks, the fracture was such a bad one that they haven't known how it would end until just lately. They do say it will be all right again now, and I am sure I hope it may; for I have six little mouths to feed, and that's enough for a strong pair of arms.'

'And have they kept house and home without you?' asked Mrs. Brame.

'No,' answered the poor man; 'when we found what a bad job it was likely to be, my poor wife was forced to go into the workhouse with the children, not to run in debt that way; but we kept on the house that we might have a home, and 'tis neatly furnished too, for we saved before we married. And when my wife found I was mending, she did beg of me so to be home by Christmas-day; so she is coming out of the workhouse with the children, and we shall meet there to-night.'

'You ought to have been in a club,' said Mrs. Brame, 'and then you would have had help through your trouble.'

‘That’s the worst of it,’ said the poor man. ‘I was in a club, and it broke, and a hundred poor fellows lost their savings like me. Some of them lay it so to heart, they say they will never be for saving again. But I think since I have been in the town I have heard from the doctors at the hospital of one better foundationed. I mean to talk to some of them to get them to try again, but I don’t see how I can with six children on hand now. But my master’s been to see me, and he says he’ll set me on in a minute when I can stand work again.’

‘Then you have nothing in hand on coming into your home?’

‘Nothing but what I can get on credit: the neighbours know I am honest, and my wife is the right sort to make much out of little. So, with the blessing of God, I trust we shall work our way round.’

The pony was now waiting at the top of the hill, and Mrs. Brame felt a little flurried; turning to the poor man she said, ‘I must lend you a helping hand on your way home to-night.’ And taking out her purse she put the bright sovereign, that had lain there in readiness for weeks, into his hand.

‘Tis gold!’ said the poor man, holding his hand still open, and looking at Mrs. Brame in unbelieving surprise.

‘I know it,’ said Mrs. Brame, who thought he wished to inform her: ‘take care you don’t lose it!’ And Mrs. Brame hastened into the carriage, and they started briskly for home.

The children had seen the poor man with his arm in a sling walking beside Mrs. Brame, and now they turned their little faces to look after him.

‘Oh, Brame, see that poor man! look back at him, Brame!’

Mrs. Brame looked; he had knelt down under the hedge on the roadside, frosty and hard, with his hands clasped in thanksgiving. A tear rose to Mrs. Brame’s eye, and a flush to her cheek, as she said, ‘Poor man! he was in trouble and I helped him a little.’

How many there are we meet unobserved, whom if we knew, we should discover in them much to win our interest and regard! but as was written once of old, so it might almost be said now, our eyes are holden that we should not know them. Is this because we are unready for them? Or it may be that some one else is appointed to minister to those whose necessity lies hid from us.

Little Sue was to have a happy Christmas this year. Christmas to her was always happy, for her blind father did not twist his willow withes on that day; they went to church in the morning, and then he and his child and the dog took a long winter’s walk. He always managed a bright fire on Christmas-day, and some little gift for his child; and he told her the blessed story of Bethlehem’s holy Infant, and the songs of angels heard on earth; and he made her understand that those angel-songs had not been heard in this fallen world since the day that Adam sinned, until that new life was given in the holy child Jesus, in whom a new creation arose, with which God was well pleased. But this was to be a warmer Christmas-day than she had ever seen before, or ever expected to see. Zarepha had not drawn the only carriage that visited Ivy Lane that day. In the morning a four-wheeled chaise drove down the whole length of Ivy Lane, and those within

looked out as if on inquiry. 'There it is, I see a basket!' said the comfortable-looking gentleman who held the reins, and he drew up before the basket-maker's shop. 'There he sits; and there's the dog, and the child looking out from a room within.' Little Sue came forward and curtsied, for she remembered Mr. Burton, whose face she now saw over the lower half of the door.

'Open the door, my dear; I have brought my wife and child to see you all to-day. Here, little Bess,' he said to the child in his arms, 'there lies the dog; run in, he won't hurt you: that's the good dog that saved you, you know.'

Little Bess looked very shy, and turned round to her mother, who by this time was out of the carriage, and she led her in.

Benjamin Tovel rose. 'You are very good to remember us, sir, and bring the lady and the dear little child; pray how do she hold?'

'Quite well — a little rosy, romping girl; are you not, Bess? Do you hear that kind man is asking for you? Come here and stroke the good dog.'

'Sue,' said her father, 'have you given the lady a chair?' and little Sue fetched one from the small room within.

'And now the gentleman,' said Benjamin Tovel.

'Oh no, thank you; I do very well.'

'Pray be seated, sir. I don't know that I ever had such an honour before as a call from the gentry, except they wanted to buy; and yet I say wrong, for there be one dear young lady in and out here, aye, times without number; she's a wonder, though she's so young, for cheering you on.'

'Glad to help those in poverty, no doubt,' said Mr. Burton, now seated on the chair Sue had brought, with little Bess on his knee.

'Tis not this world's good things she can bring, sir. They do say she is poor, aye, as poor for a lady as we are in our lot; but the sunshine bides on her, and that riches can't give.'

'You can feel it, if you can't see it,' Mr. Burton said.

'Ah, sir, 'tis the light that dark eyes can't shut out; and when they have it whose education is far above ours, it lifts the spirit up to hold a little discourse.'

'Who is she?' inquired Mr. Burton.

'Miss Campbell, sir; her father is blind — an officer, they say, who lodges here in the town.'

'I have seen her, then,' said Mr. Burton to his wife; 'don't you remember a blind gentleman with a lovely girl by his side? I really think the dog remembers the child!' Sharp had come up to the child, looked at her, and now laid himself down by her. 'What a fine dog he would be if well kept! but I must say he looks better than he did.'

'He is bound to do so, sir, for it is by your charity he is fed.'

'My gratitude, you should say,' replied Mr. Burton. 'If I could keep you happy without him I would buy him at any price.'

'I am afraid, sir, you could only keep him chained.'

'Why so? he is not fierce, is he?'

'Not now, sir, while free; but he is that faithful nature he would break through anything but iron to be back with Sue and me.'

‘ Well, if he had not been your dog he would not have been by at my hour of need, so I ought not to grudge him to you ; only we must come and look after him now and then : you won’t object to that ? I should not like my little Bess to forget him, nor you and the child either. Bess, what do you say to that dear little girl ? She took your head on her lap when the good dog brought you out of the river.’

Mrs. Burton had all this time had her kind looks—now on the dog, now on little Sue.

‘ What a tiny-limbed child she is !’ said Farmer Burton. ‘ Don’t you think we could stouten her up a little ?’ he said to his wife, who looked at Sue, and said, ‘ Would you like to come and see my little girl in her home ?’

Little Sue was standing by her father, and she slipped her hand in his, as if for security, and curtsied, and said softly, ‘ No, thank you.’ And her father answered, ‘ I fear, sir, my life is bound up in the life of my child, and if she went from me her father would die.’

Mr. Burton looked on the wan, yet peaceful face of the blind man, but in his own hearty sense of life he replied, ‘ No, no, my good friend ; we are not bound together like that : each life by itself is supported by God.’

‘ You are right, sir,’ said Benjamin Tovel : ‘ but I doubt its being well for the little one to go ; she is used now to the poverty that has long been our lot, and she would not bear it the better for seeing a change.’

‘ Well, that may be, I grant : but, Bessy, what have you brought ? A Christmas-box, hey ?’ Saying this, Mr.

Burton went out to the carriage, and returned with a bale in his arms. 'There,' he said, 'that is a little Christmas cheer from my little girl; you must open it when time serves you best. Now, Bessy, say good-bye,' and with kindest farewells they parted.

The bale, tied up in sacking, was lifted by Benjamin Tovel into the small back-room, while little Sue, in wondering delight, knelt down by it to help her father untie the great knots. But, when opened, who shall describe the comfort unfolded in that little back-room for the blind man and his child! A warm pair of blankets, through which no cold would come; a complete suit of clothes for Benjamin Tovel; a red cloak for little Sue, with warm flannel besides; and a new collar and bag of meal, written upon 'For the dog.'

There could be little sleep expected that night, it was worth while lying awake to enjoy the feeling of warmth. And this was Christmas-tide, when the night is dear as the day, and full of thoughts that should for evermore hallow the darkness. The night when angel-wings fanned the air, and the songs of heaven made the music of earth, and when He who inhabiteth eternity lay cradled a tender infant in the arms of a woman. The night when in this fallen world there rose the fresh spring of that river of God's pleasures, whose gentle flow has never ceased making the wilderness and the solitary place glad, and the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose. But little Sue did fall soon and sweetly asleep, lulled by warmth of soft blankets, with a bloom on her cheek that the blind father felt when he kissed her, and the peace of that Christmas night brooded over her pillow.

How was it with Edith and Charley at this Christmas-tide? Poor children! they had not been well content, for they could not hold by themselves the higher level to which they had been raised by a friend. Miss Mansfield was gone home for her holidays, and the idle time proved more wearying to her little pupils than lesson-days had been with her. Charley wanted to go and see his little cripple friend, Me; was afraid the poor boy would think he had forgotten him, and would forget all he had learned in his lesson-book, too: but Mrs. Collins said she could not allow him to go until Miss Mansfield returned. Then Charley wanted to read, but the hard names turned him back without a friend by his side. Edith sorted her little work-box, and her coloured prints in her drawer, and her gay wools for knitting; but as yet she had not learned to do anything alone. The time was but short, only six months, since Miss Mansfield came: another six months, and we may hope they will be less helpless alone; or, rather, we may trust these dear children will be learning the blessed truth, that there is a Friend always beside us, near, though unseen; that learning of Him we can, however young, find happy employment in our work or our play, and overcome difficulties, and find interests around us within doors or without, wherever we may be. But Charley and Edith did not understand this as yet; they thought only of Miss Mansfield, and wished she had not gone away.

‘I shall tell her she must not go away any more,’ said Charley; ‘no one else can want her so much as we do.’

‘Oh, Charley!’ said Edith, ‘you know Miss Mansfield

has brothers and sisters too, and of course they want to see her ; you must not say so.'

On Christmas-day Edith presented her first knitting to her mother—a shawl of beautiful colours, the labour of many hours.

'Did you make this, my dear? How clever, I am sure!'

There were splendid gifts for Edith and Charley, but they had had so many that they did not think much about them : for when grand things are plentiful they give no more pleasure than common. And the children thought of Miss Mansfield, and Me, and his sister, little Meggie, with more interest than of all Christmas gifts and toys. And no voice told them sweet tales of the little mountain village, and the blessed Infant in the manger, and the love that brought Him there, as the spring of all Christian and Christmas joy in this redeemed world.

At the Hall little Constance said, 'Call us early, dear Cox: call us early—will you promise? you know it is Christmas-day really to-morrow;' for the long pleasure of preparation had made Christmas seem to come earlier.

'Call me, too,' said Alfred. 'But I mean to wake myself, and be up very early; I have a great many things to do.'

And little Maud would have echoed the voices, but she lay already in slumber, like countless infants of earth, whom that Infant of Bethlehem came as on that night to redeem from all evil.

The day came at last; and the children awoke, and glad voices were heard in warm greetings. They seemed

to say, 'If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.'

Let us look a moment in another village on that Christmas morning. A father stands ready dressed for the service at church, his children gathering round him; he has a hand for one, the other hand is bound in a sling. The mother is tying on the youngest girl's little bonnet, and the baby is ready.

'I have put the plum-pudding on to boil, and I shall soon overtake you,' said the happy voice of the mother; 'for I am sure such unlooked-for help and goodness calls us to give thanks as well for the body as for the soul! There, you run with father, and mother will be coming.'

Mrs. Brame kept her own quiet Christmas amidst the gladness around. One while a passing thought showed her Widow Garson and her neatly-clad children stepping happy to church. Another, she felt glad that she had aid at hand to give, at the only moment she could have given, to the disabled father. She thought of the 'Were there not ten cleansed, but where are the nine? there are not found that returned to give glory to God save this stranger.' How swift his thanksgiving spread its glad wings to heaven! how slow she felt hers had often been when it waited for night, and was perhaps in her weariness forgotten then! and Mrs. Brame took home to her own heart the lesson of thanksgiving. So passed the Christmas. 'Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace, and goodwill to men.'

CHAPTER XVI.

‘ I HAD mice in my room last night, Fentyman ; you really must find out what brings them,’ Mrs. Collins said to her housekeeper. ‘ I must have the house searched. The state of nerves in which I lay last night, expecting to see one on the curtain or pillow, has completely over-set me to-day. The nibbling was something distressing ; it seemed to me to be in the wall between my room and the school-room.’

‘ The walls are good enough,’ replied Fentyman ; ‘ it could not be in them : but I will see to the closet in the school-room.’

‘ Whatever it may be, you must find it out, and get rid of it before another night, or I shall be ill with broken rest !’

The housekeeper proceeded to a personal search, and hid away in the school-room closet she found at each far corner a little heap of such good things as mice particularly like. There was in each corner a slice of Christmas-cake, wrapped up in paper — paper and cake both nibbled round ; there were also additions in the form of sweetmeats, oranges, raisins, and almonds—all arranged in great neatness, as if with extreme care, and the light-footed little mice had not displaced their order ; they had only nibbled in every direction.

‘ Now, Master Collins, who put all these things here?’ said Mrs. Fentyman, as the child entered the room.

‘ Oh, Fenty, what are you doing? Don’t touch that closet; it is mine and Edith’s: mamma gave it to us to keep our treasures in!’

‘ Not to keep musty cake for mice to nibble, I am sure,’ said Mrs. Fentyman; ‘ as if you had not too much of good things every day, and must go hoarding! Here is your mamma distracted with mice, calling me to account for their getting upstairs, when it is all your messes in here that brought them.’

‘ They are not messes, Fenty! that is Christmas-cake. If the mice have nibbled it a little I will cut off the outside, and make the closet quite neat before I put it back again.’

‘ And what use will that be? they must be thrown away, and traps put in instead, if your mamma is to have any peace.’

‘ Now, Fenty, go away; I will do it all myself, and you are not to meddle.’

‘ Very well, then; your mamma must settle that.’

Mrs. Fentyman went to the drawing-room to inform her mistress of the cause of the nightly disturbance, and that it was not the least use in the world for her to stand arguing with Master Collins, for he would have his way. On hearing this, Mrs. Collins went up to the school-room in displeasure. Charley had fetched his sister, and both the children were standing before the closet.

‘ What are you hiding up eatables for in your closet? Turn them all out directly! Here is the house overrun

with mice through these tricks of yours. Where are they?’

‘Oh, mamma, don’t meddle! I will show you,’ said Charley. ‘Just peep, and you will see.’

‘I will have them all turned out,’ said Mrs. Collins, and she rang the bell. ‘Martha, bring a dust-pan and brush, and clear out this rubbish from the children’s closet.’

‘Oh, mamma, please do let it stay! We have kept it there ever since Christmas-day; and indeed the mice haven’t spoilt it at all, only just nibbled a little, which we can clear away; and you know, mamma, Miss Mansfield will be home in a week, and then we can take it to little Me and Meggie, and their poor mother. We saved it all for them; it was the largest bit that we had!’

This special pleading did not exactly meet the case in hand, though Charley and Edith, in their misty conceptions of the cause of distress, thought it quite to the point. But Martha had returned with dust-pan and brush, a far more conclusive argument. Mrs. Collins had, however, relented under the melting and mingling appeal from both children. She put in her hand, instead of sending in the housemaid’s brush; and when one little parcel came out after another, done up so neatly in white paper, with odd bits of ribbon, coloured wool, or string, the nibbled paper showing the contents of each, and Edith pleaded that no other store could be like this, which they had saved up for three weeks, Mrs. Collins said, ‘Well, don’t make any more fuss about it; put it all into a basket, and take it downstairs to the butler’s pantry,

and we will drive up to-morrow and leave it at the door.'

This turned the trouble into rejoicing; even Mrs. Fentyman was pacified, and there was a fresh packing up, with nibbled corners cut off, and fresh stores were added from Mrs. Fentyman's now compassionate heart. Only once her displeasure rose again, when Charley, in his innocence of the real cause of disquiet, said he was going to put the nibbled crumbs back into the closet, because the poor little mice would be so disappointed when they came and found none.

Mrs. Fentyman said they should not go back, unless they went in a trap; and Charley was greatly hurt, and said no trap should ever go there. Mrs. Collins was obliged again to interfere, and Charley had to give up the crumbs, in expectation of the next day's promised pleasure. But no trap went into his closet, so the poor little mice came and went in their hunger, gnawing a few leaves of some lesson-books there; but when they found no better cheer, they soon ceased to come, paying visits elsewhere; and it is thought they were at last surprised in a trap, and so troubled Mrs. Collins no more.

The next day came in due course, as the next day always does, however long it may seem to young expectations, and Charley and Edith and the basket, were all watching and waiting at the hall-door. When the carriage drove round the children hurried in, and took the large basket between them, Charley resting one arm upon the handle by way of protection. But when Mrs. Collins was seated, and saw the basket, she said, 'Send that

basket outside; I cannot be stifled with the smell of eatables here!' But Charley declared that if the basket went outside he must go too.

'My dear, what could happen to it? The men are not hungry; they won't eat up your stores.'

'I don't know about that,' said Charley; 'I can't trust it out of sight.'

'You must drive on,' said Mrs. Collins, 'to the Common—some cottage up there;' and Charley sat guarding his store.

Poor Charley! he had not yet learned that obedience is not the minding one voice alone, which may have gained an influence controlling our wills, but obeying all authority to which we ought to submit, and, above all other earthly authority, obeying the voice and will of a parent. No one had taught him to obey, until Miss Mansfield came; her time had been short as yet, and her lessons but few. And was there not hope that children who had begun to learn self-forgetfulness in thinking of others would before long learn to think first of their parents—that highest obligation of earth, the observance of which, in the Commandments of God, is placed next to the obedience that we owe unto Him? All wilful disobedience, therefore, to the word of a parent must stand as disobedience to God.

The children looked eagerly out when the carriage reached the Common.

'There! there it is!' shouted Charley, leaning out of the window; 'that one little house that stands all alone!'

A carriage at the door astonished the poor woman,

who had never received a friendly call from any in station above her, until the children came with Miss Mansfield. She hurried out, but Charley had ordered the carriage-door to be opened, and he sprang out without notice of the poor mother.

‘Now, Edith, the basket; and you come in too,’ and the children rushed in.

Mrs. Collins was astonished, as she sat in the carriage, to see the poor little crippled boy throw his arms round Charley’s neck in the excess of his joy at seeing his friend again after long separation—a separation not expected nor understood by him, and so leaving him in doubt whether they would ever appear any more; for Miss Mansfield had left a little sooner than she was prepared for, and so no warning had been given to the friends on the Common. Edith had by this time found her little pet in the cradle; she was dressed in the pink frock that Edith had made: this was irresistible, and, grasping hold of little Meggie in a rather unusual fashion of nursing, she carried her off to the carriage.

‘Oh, mamma, do look here,—this is little Meggie! She is such a darling!—the dearest little thing—if she would but open her eyes!’

‘Now, Edith, my dear, give the child to its mother; you will let it fall the next moment under the wheels!’

‘Oh, mamma, but do look! I made this pretty pink frock,—I did, indeed; I made it all, and it fits her so well. I’ll just come into the carriage, and have her on my knee. Do take Meggie a minute,’ she said to the poor mother, who had not appeared in any alarm at Edith’s remarkable nursing.

‘ Now, Edith, take care; you are quite forgetting yourself. I cannot have babies in the carriage with me.’

‘ Oh, mamma, she is not a baby, indeed; she is quite a little girl, and will sit upon my knee. Now, give me little Meggie in here, on my lap,’ said Edith, smoothing her blue merino, and setting her two feet quite firm on the carriage-floor. The poor mother obeyed, and handed in little Meggie, who opened her black eyes, and seeing Mrs. Collins sitting there before her with a rather forbidding face, between astonishment and fear little Meggie cried.

‘ Now, now, don’t cry,’ saith Edith. ‘ There, it’s me, do you see? Who made you this pretty pink frock, little Meggie? See!—see!’ and Edith danced the window-tassel, and the cry changed to a crow of satisfaction and pleasure.

‘ Do take your child!’ Mrs. Collins said imploringly to the poor woman. ‘ My daughter is not used to babies; it keeps me in terror.’

The mother stretched out her arms and lifted Meggie away, who now cried to go back, at which Edith sprang out to comfort the child.

‘ Do find your brother; tell him I must go, Edith.’

Edith went in. Mrs. Collins looked after her, and saw the happy face of her boy looking up to little Me as he sat on a low stool beside the wheelchair, and heard him say, ‘ You good little boy, you have not forgotten at all! Now I will give you a new lesson: four letters you shall learn. How pleased Miss Mansfield will be! Now spell after me,—C-o-a-l, coal; f-i-r-e, fire. Edith, what is this word—I-r-o-n?’ ‘ Iron,’ said Edith. ‘ And what is this next—Z-i-n-c?’ ‘ I don’t know,’ said Edith. ‘ I don’t

think that Z ought to be at the beginning; that is why I don't know it.' 'Dear me, we must wait for Miss Mansfield! Oh, no; I will just ask mamma. Mamma,' said Charley, running to the open carriage-door, 'do tell me what this word is.'

'Charley, I cannot be waiting here all the day; you must come.'

'Don't you know it, mamma? I did so hope you would! "Z-i-n-c." Edith says that Z ought not to be there.'

'My dear child, it is "zinc." But what are you after now? I cannot wait here all day.'

'Oh, no, mamma, — not all day; only just these four words. Little Me learns so fast! he does so want some more, and Miss Mansfield will be so surprised, you know. I think I can say them all, now: coal, fire, iron, zinc.'

'Now, Charley, my dear boy, don't you be long.'

The poor woman, seeing the agitation of the lady's manner, came out and spoke of the goodness that dear young gentleman and lady had showed her, of the change in her poor boy, and the comfort in the home, until the kind feeling that lived in the heart of Mrs. Collins was kindled at length into interest and expression; and the poor woman, finding how the simple tales of her home life began to interest the lady, went on with its details, which so shortened the time, that on the next call to Charley and Edith they were ready to come.

Mrs. Collins thought again of that poor woman on her return to her home, who had brought up so large a family in such poverty, and certain useful things were ordered through Fentyman, and sent up unknown to the children,

as Mrs. Collins would have dreaded the idea of such another call on the Common. But fresh clothing came for the worn-out stores of the cottage, and comfort and rest for aching limbs, and happier eyes and looks less weary, and the spring of younger years seemed returning again. And when Miss Mansfield came back there were stories to tell that were delightful to hear; and the welcome she met was only second to that of her home; and reading, work, and lessons, play, and visits to little Me, were all regular again.

Patience in her home still thought upon Benjamin Tovel and little Sue. Her motherly affections clung around the child, and the state of the blind man moved her compassion, no less than his piety won her regard and veneration. She often looked at the corner where he sat, and missed the heavenly companionship that had strengthened her faith and brightened her pathway with clearer light from above. The cottage was large, with three bedrooms above; at present she only used one, and made store-rooms of the others. There was also a good bricked room in the front, next to their lower room — it was not ceiled nor plastered, and they used it for wood; but how easily it might be made into a room as pleasant almost, though not quite so large, as their own! There the blind man might dwell, Patience thought, close beside them; her time was her own, and how well she could see to the few wants he would have! He could follow his trade, and then living rent-free, with the milk of her cow for the child and for him, and a little bacon from their pigs, or an egg from their hens, which they should never miss, why, he would seem quite rich! And then there was the kind notice that

would be taken of him and the child by the Lady Gertrude, and the sweet children, and the kind servants of the Hall; and her own mistress, Mrs. Smith, and Miss Rose, and Master William; and then their good Minister too! while, in the town, no minister had ever entered their home. Patience thought on all this by day and by night, until it quite filled her mind, and she felt as if she must speak to her husband, to ease the burden of these bright possibilities of change from Ivy Lane to her cottage, with all that would follow. But Patience was a very silent woman, and she still kept her thoughts to herself for a time.

Then again they rose up before her in another light. She began to consider how Mr. Clifford had given the good place that they lived in to her husband's dear old mother, to make her latter days easy, and to be sure it did that; but how soon she was taken! and only Jem and she left in the full strength of life to live in the cottage that was given for the sake of the aged. Not but that she knew the Squire had that regard for her husband, that he would never be against the house being his home; but now, if they could give a shelter to those whose need was so plain, it would seem more answerable to the goodness that gave it. And who could be more like unto him it was built for, than was Benjamin Tovel? If the Squire did but know him, he would almost be thinking they had found up another Old Willy again. There was all to be said for it, and what could be against it? Still Patience was silent.

'I say, Patience girl,' said her husband one day, 'your thoughts are all of a heap upon something; I can see that,

as clear as ever I saw the pebbles lie piled in the brook.'

'I can't get that blind traveller and his child out of mind, Jem.'

'Nor any one else that ever once got in!' answered her husband.

'I don't know for that,' said Patience; 'but, you see, they are so lonely like out there in the great world, and here we be in this house, never builded, as you know, Jem, for them that could work. And when dear Old Willy was taken up to a better home, it was given for you to make a home for your mother. Then, see how we lost her. And now we bide here alone, not befriending of any.'

'Then your mind runs on having them here?'

'Well, you know there is that room we use for our wood, as well built up of brick as a room wants to be, all on the ground-floor, and a door to hand too. It would be just nothing but a bit of plaster and whitewash; and a little stone or a few bricks laid down on the floor, and there would be a place all complete for a home. He could follow his trade there; and you know the goodness that runs down like a river, as the saying is, in this parish, Jem, that they never could want, nor yet lie heavy on any.'

'Well, if that be not a good thought, I don't know what is,' answered Jem. 'What, shall I speak to the Squire, and ask his leave at once? I should think he would take to it kindly. I could tell him the blind man is as like to dear Old Willy as any two men could be with a score of years odds between them.'

Jem was feeding his sheep on the frosty earth the next day, when he saw the Squire riding over the downs,

with little Alfred on Snowberry beside him. Jem turned to meet him,—

‘I beg pardon, sir.’

‘All right,’ said the Squire; ‘we are in no great hurry to-day, and you have something to say.’

‘Papa,’ said little Alfred, ‘I must get down, there is old Nep; he will fetch and carry for me, papa.’

‘Very well, you may have a run, only keep in sight, remember.’

So little Alfred slipped off Snowberry to bestow his companionship on Nep.

‘Well, Jem, what business to-day?’

‘’Tis my wife, sir,’ said Jem: ‘she wants to neighbour a blind man in our cottage-house, a poor traveller on the road; we harboured them two nights. The dog saved the child of Farmer Burton down at the Grange.’

‘Yes, I heard of that: we might envy you, Jem, saving the life of those poor things adrift in the fog!’

‘And they were worth the saving, sir; as we have reason to know, for they bided three nights under shelter of our roof, and to my thinking none more heavenly could be: he is as like to Old Willy as one star to another.’

‘And your wife wants to give them a home? but you have no room, I fear, to spare.’

‘As for that, sir, it is only plaster on the walls of that bricked room where we have stowed up our wood; I can build up a lean-to, free and easy for that. They would live free of rent; then, like us, he could follow his trade. And my wife don’t reckon it right down honest in us, sir, strong and active as we be, to bide alone in the house you built up for the old.’

‘As for that, Jem, if you have my free will I suppose that will set you quit of all dishonest scores. But it may be all right to give shelter to others if you know those who need it, and don’t put yourselves out. Only what will the parish say if you bring in helpless poor?’

‘As to that, sir,’ said Jem, in a tone of hearty decision, ‘I can show them a pair of hands that never ate paupers’ bread, and while they be free to labour none of mine ever shall; and if I bring in the blind man it will be to care for him like a son.’

‘That must be right then, Jem, so far as I see.’

‘The man himself is no pauper, sir,’ said Jem, whom the thought had aroused; ‘he earns his honest bread, and is clever at his trade, and such a man to discourse with as I should say all might consider it a blessing to the parish to have him brought in.’

‘Well, Jem, he seems worthy for whom you should do this; I wish you good speed. You must let us know when he comes. Your wish carries out my purpose in making that dwelling a home for the homeless. You remember that evening when you drew the tarpauling over the roof?’ and the Squire smiled from his tall horse, and turned to ride after his boy. And Jem said,—

‘No need for make-shifts there now, sir.’ And Alfred stopped his careering with Nep, sprang on his little pony, and they were soon out of sight.

Patience always had leave to take her children up to the farm when she had occasion to go to the town; they were great favourites with Mrs. Smith and Rose: but it was very seldom Patience left her home. The next day, however, she took them both there, and set out on foot for

the town. The walk hardly seemed long in her eager desire. She reached Ivy Lane, but thought not now of her own childhood there. She pressed on to the end where a basket was hanging, and saw in a moment more the blind man at his work, with little Sue beside him, and Sharp on the floor. Little Sue gave a cry of joy at the sight, and flew to her embrace. The blind man raised his head in amaze; but a moment more, and the quiet tones of that voice that welcomed him to harbour and home from the chilling fog of the river broke on his ear, and he took the hand that she gave him in both of his, and felt as if a daughter were come. Little Sue drew Patience to the inner room, where a fire burned in the small grate, and Benjamin Tovel came too, and they all sat down there. And when the overjoyed feeling of the unexpected meeting subsided a little, then Patience told how Jem had arranged all to give them a home. The blind man could not speak for some moments, so deep was his thankfulness. Then he said,—

‘Oh, my daughter, you have lightened all the path I have yet to tread! it seems like Jacob’s ladder, reaching one end down to me, and the other end to the mansions above. I must still bide here a little while longer,’ he said; ‘but that dear home before me shows the distance in light. Little one, run to Mammy Garson, tell her who be come; she will be thankful enough, I am sure, to speak a word to you here.’

‘Daddy, lets we just run and tell Sammy we want him!’ So little Sue ran first to Mammy Garson, then with Rachel to Sammy.

Left alone with Patience, Benjamin Tovel told her of

the constant friend that the widow, even in her deepest poverty, had been to him and his child. How she had cared for little Sue like a mother, and shown him that constant care and kindness words could never express. He told Patience that the poor widow knew she was dying; he said, 'It is only the kindness of the gentry at the great house in your village that has cheered her up heart and body a bit: but the time can't be long, and I could not leave her alone. She often does say she has found comfort from me, and if she should need it then how could I be away? And the poor children, I must see the last of them: they are too young for service, and must go to the workhouse; but I do hear that at their age they won't be bad off there, and will pick up more learning than they could get at home: for Sammy can't be beat off from the thought of earning a living for his mother. Poor child! when he does come back to her with a few pence, he is almost as great as a prince with his crown. She will feel it less for them if she knows I am by, for they have long been used to me now, and have young hearts full of love.'

Patience could only say,—

'Let it be so, then; all shall be ready, and you will know the door stands open for you when you can come in.'

Then little Sue came in triumph, leading her friends: Mammy Garson, whose pale wan face lighted up with a smile of such welcome and blessing on Patience as she could never forget; Rachel, who looked up in love to the one who had saved her friends; and Sammy, with his broom, who said,—

'When little Sue goes to see you, may Sammy come too?' And Patience said, 'Yes.' And her large

heart opened wide, and she felt as if she could take them all in, and life be only the happier and holier for each one that stood there. On the face of the widow she saw that shadow of death that rests as a veil over the life immortal within, the life that, as the outward man decays, is renewed day by day, and often throws its radiance around the gloom of the grave. Patience saw this, and feared not for the widow, whose departing steps were illumined with a light that she knew would shine brighter and brighter to the perfect day.

When the time came to go she pressed little Sue to her heart; the child's arms clung round her neck, but she did not speak a word. Patience listened and longed for the uttered farewell, but the child parted in silence, with such a wistful smile on her face, that it left its impression on the heart that received it, as if graven there in its touching sweetness for ever. When Patience had gone a few yards she turned to look back; there they all stood at the little shop-door. Poor Sharp had followed her a few steps. Little Sue stood with Sammy beside her; he had put one arm round her neck in consoling affection, the other held his little broom: behind stood Mammy Garson, Rachel, and the blind man, who pictured Patience's form in his darkness. And Patience left Ivy Lane.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE blind officer's child, whose youthful ministry of love had lightened to many the pathway of life, was herself one of those we sometimes look upon here, around whose morning of life the shadows gather thickly, yet the sun shines softly through them, like that promise in nature which makes us feel sure the after-day will be clear.

She could not remember her mother, who had departed this life soon after her birth, leaving her an infant, in India. She was born to wealth, but before she knew either the true or supposed value of money it was no longer hers. The shock of this loss of property had greatly affected her father; she had already been sent over to England, and a few years after he followed, threatened with blindness, which soon became total. Her uncle had been the manager of her mother's property—her mother's only brother—and, though it was lost through some fatal speculation, he still remained in a position of independence. Olivia was sent to his care. She found but a cold refuge for her childhood in his house; and joyfully welcomed the return of her father, and the prospect of life, though in poverty, with him.

Olivia did not know that any particular reason led her father to fix on a lodging in the large town to which they

now came. She afterwards learned it was there he first saw her mother, who was visiting near, and they never afterwards met until in India he again saw the smile that had been as a sunbeam ever resting on life's troubled waters to him. Now broken in health, bereaved in heart, and with darkness ever attending his steps, he came with his only child to live on his pension in a quiet lodging in the old town. Olivia had early learned a personal independence, for the house of her relatives had been no indulgent home to her. And now her ready powers enabled her to learn the best economy of small means, and the comforts most needful to her father. She also won the interest of the mistress of the house where they lodged, and the goodwill of the house-servant who waited on them. They had been happy in finding a lodging with those who could feel for them with the sympathy of compassionate hearts. This made life far easier to the young motherless girl, who, without this, could hardly have left her father's side; but the certainty that he would be cared for if she were away, encouraged her often to take a short walk: without this her health must have given way, but this brief time of refreshment and change enabled her to bear the burden of the day; for with all her love for her father, and that love was devoted, the day brought its burden of toil and of care.

Her father, in his blindness, leaned in helpless dependence on his child: he saw not how young the face was that was constantly beaming on his, and rather judged his child's powers by her mental development, which was naturally beyond her years, and matured by the necessities of daily life in which circumstances placed her. The

weight that rested on her was heavy for the elastic spring of so young a life to bear, the more so as her best efforts often seemed to fail, and a sad irritation, or dejected silence in her father, could hardly be beguiled into repose or interest. Yet the spirit within that darkened dwelling of the body was brighter and more vigorous than its outward life could testify. Its energy was often consumed in the one single effort of enduring the sense of pain, and the weary restlessness of nerve that could not quiet itself, and had no power to yield to the soothing efforts of his child. Could he have said as much as this it would have made her work easier; but at the point where self-command fails, the power of expressing that sense of failure is often gone too: yet an effort to retain the power of expression may prove a great aid to those who suffer, and not less so to those who attend on them. Her father, in his state of suffering and earthly privation, ceased not the conflict with self; but the struggle was unseen by outward observation. Often when to that Eye that looketh on the heart the victory was won, to all others he still seemed to fail, and silence became his constant resource.

Olivia held on like a bright streamlet, that flowed in the midst of his life's darkened current, itself never dim, but pouring for him its first freshness of thought and feeling. And it was as the very balm of life to him, and often in freer moments his soul overflowed with thankfulness for the treasure left to brighten the dark world.

In her lonely walks she had soon discovered the blind basket-maker and little Sue; attracted at first by his privation resembling her father's, she ventured into his

shop to talk with him and the child. Little Sue appeared to her the sweetest child she had ever seen. She looked like one fair blossom left alone, where all had withered beside, or like one little bird from the firmament of heaven making its nest and pouring its song on the tree that the lightning had scathed. She knew not how little Sue resembled herself, who, in years a little older, fulfilled the same mission of love. And when, in visits often repeated, she became better acquainted with Benjamin Tovel, she found in him the very power that more acute suffering had denied to her blind father, the free power of expression; not in words only, but in the serenity that beamed from his spirit on his sightless face. No other friend could then have been to her the friend he became. He seemed able to understand every difficulty, solve every question, and shed a cheering light on each doubt that perplexed her youthful mind. She always returned from her visits to the blind basket-maker and little Sue lightened, strengthened, and cheered in her own life of ministering love.

These visits were the more frequent because, alone as she was, she shrank from walking far, and disliked the town; so she would the oftener turn by a short path to Ivy Lane, and spend a brief half-hour in companionship with the blind basket-maker and his child, seated in his little shop, while his busy fingers plied the willows; or teaching little Sue to read or to work. To the blind man and his child these visits yielded as much as Olivia received herself from them. He felt the refined pleasure of converse with a mind elevated and enriched in thought and feeling as Olivia's; the power of leading her on in those best hopes, ever brightening, whatever else may darken or decay; and

the help to his child which he could not give. Even the rich tones of her voice soothed the blind man like music ; and poor Sharp shared, not without reason, in the attachment thus formed.

It was from Benjamin Tovel that Olivia heard of the illness of the poor man named Garson, who lived in the Lane. She then went to visit him, and became to him a messenger of blessing in his life's lingering decline. In these visits she became in some degree acquainted with others ; and the more so because her feeling was strong of not appearing unmindful of any. This feeling had prompted her to speak in friendly inquiry to Mrs. Brame, which led to the sad tragedy of Smut in the chimney. All the trouble for Olivia which followed, formed a part of the trial, disappointment, and discipline, that often attend upon self-denying efforts for others, purifying the motives, and leading the mind to rest satisfied in the approval of Him who has said, ' The desire of a man is his kindness.'

Yet Olivia knew not this result at the time ; she thought upon her single forgetfulness of poor Sharp on that day ; that he too should have followed her, which he never did before ; and wondered why it was that so much trouble and grief should have been suffered to follow from her once neglecting an act of kindness, that, but for her thoughtful care, would never have been expected or missed. But when Smut proved the occasion of Widow Garson's deliverance by Mrs. Brame, Olivia felt all her former trouble changed into joy, and thought she could never be daunted by difficulties or disappointments again. The daily life of each one who walks by faith unfolds events such as this,

consequences most important and enduring that lay hid in some birthplace as obscure, or act as insignificant as any we could relate. Nor can we wonder at this, when the page of Holy Scripture reveals to our sight that the preservation of that nation of whom the world's Redeemer was to be born, turned on the fact recorded in those eight words, 'On that night could not the king sleep.' It is of the same Divine Providence the royal Psalmist sings when he says, 'Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.' Of the same that an Apostle appeals to those to whom he writes when he says, 'Ye have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy.' Of the same our own poet writes when he says,

'The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.'

Olivia now thought no more trouble was felt on behalf of poor Smut. The sweetest balm of comfort in the deliverance to Widow Garson had healed, and far more than healed, all the grief in her heart. She now only thought of Mrs. Brame as of one sent to shed blessing, and trusted that she had forgiven her part in the long past, and now happily comforted, disaster of the cat. But that disaster had proved a step in a new life to Mrs. Brame. When, softened in feeling by little Alfred's appeal, she had related in the nursery the tale of poor Smut, her conscience reproved her, and she felt the reproof. Many a reproof does that faithful witness within give which falls unheeded. It is only so far as our inward sense is softened and renewed that its warning is felt. Mrs. Brame had indeed forgiven

what before she had resented as a wrong ; the burden was now her own accusing conscience for the displeasure she had felt, and the unkindness she had shown. Often in wakeful hours of the night the sweet pleading face of that young girl rose before her in remembrance ; she could see as clearly, as if then before her, the tortoiseshell kitten on her arm, in its little red-leather collar, the look of entreaty she gave, as bent on repairing the wrong, and the tears in her eyes when she turned repulsed from the door. What relief Mrs. Brame would have felt if she could but have blotted out that one act of her life ! yet there, no doubt, were many as really hard as that, only the light fell not then on them, and therefore she felt them not.

We must remember that our whole life is pictured in colours that cannot fade, for they are not exposed to the atmosphere of earth, but are drawn with an invisible hand on the pages of conscience, which that hand opens at will. It is as in secret and silence page by page of this record is opened before us, that we learn to say, ' I have sinned.' And it is not now ' An enemy's hand that hath done this,' but that blessed and eternal Spirit, whose first work of divine renewal is to convince of sin, that then He may point us to Him, ' the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world.' Let us never forget that there is a world where the record of conscience lies always open, and the burning light of truth kindles the colours of each scene, and the eye must rest upon them in vain remorse and despair. It has been said, that over the portals of that world is written,—

'All hope abandon, ye who enter here.'

Let us then not shun the personal inquiry now, nor imagine that sins we have lost sight of will never re-appear, but rather earnestly ask the light of Truth to recall to us the past, while it is written, 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'

The hard frosts of the new year had broken up suddenly in February, and at its close damp weather and fever prevailed. The Doctor who attended at the Hall, and kept a friendly watch to give all needful alarms, reported the prevalence of fever in the town. There was no case of fever in Ivy Lane, and Mrs. Brame was sent in alone as the bearer of some additional aid, that by increased nourishment Widow Garson and her children might be less liable to the fatal fever. Mrs. Brame found Widow Garson looking sadly distressed, and almost unable to cheer up at the tokens of care for their welfare brought by her, though she did give a smile of pleasure over two little parcels, which had been done up by Constance and Alfred for Rachel and Sammy.

'Have you any fresh trouble?' Mrs. Brame at length asked, being more observant now of the expression of the face than she once would have been.

Widow Garson replied, 'Captain Campbell has the fever, and he is weakly at best; but I am most afraid for the dear young lady, for she is his nurse.'

Mrs. Brame heard the widow in silence; not the silence of indifference, far from it: she was sitting quietly there; no outward emotion marked what was passing within, but she felt a deeper pang than when Smut disappeared. Hearing no reply from Mrs. Brame, and yet perceiving the

look of concern on her face, the widow took courage, and putting her hand in her pocket drew from it a note, saying, 'This came to me this morning. I had wondered that she had not been here — she was not used to be absent so long. I had a misgiving, and lost many a look for her, fearing something was wrong.'

Mrs. Brame took the letter, drew her spectacle-case from her pocket, laid the case on the table, rubbed up both glasses, and put them on. Mrs. Brame then read the note, and Widow Garson looked anxiously on the strong, settled countenance, as those words so dear to her were silently read. The note was as follows:—

'MY DEAR FRIEND,—You must not be troubled at what I have to tell you. My dear father is ill. He has taken the fever, and it has pulled down his strength so quickly that the Doctor fears for him; but we know in Whose hands our life is! He will not have a nurse; he says, he knows well what they are: he thinks it would ruin him and cost all he has. I wish he would consent, for I think there would then be more hope. I sleep on a little bed by his side, and the people here are so good they always want me to lie down in the afternoon while they wait upon him; but I am too anxious to rest. You shall soon hear again, but be sure you don't come; you will double all my care if you do: it is not you alone, but Rachel and Sammy, and little Sue and all of you, I think of; it is my best earthly comfort to think of you all, and if the fever got into Ivy Lane we cannot tell who might not die! Trouble came to you, and you were delivered; now you must trust for me, and deliverance will come. My dear father is as gentle and patient as a little

child: it is wonderful to see him, and the greatest comfort to me to do all I can.

‘Yours in trouble, but in hope,
‘OLIVIA CAMPBELL.’

‘He will die,’ said Mrs. Brame, calmly, as she folded up the letter and laid it on the table, ‘and the poor child must take it: no hope for her escape, nursing him so!’

A groan from the widow arrested Mrs. Brame’s calm calculations. They were not the calculations of her heart, but the cool judgment of one used to sickness and accustomed from the first to predict the event. But the widow—her heart seemed bound up in the young life, from whose expressive lips she first learned that ‘God is love;’ and under whose simple reading of Holy Scripture she had seen the faith and hope of her dying husband brighten, until the valley of shadows had no gloom for him. That piteous cry recalled Mrs. Brame from professional calculations to the feeling of interest, not less real though less poignant, within her own breast. She rose hastily, put her spectacles in their case, and returned them to her pocket, saying, as if in deep deliberation, ‘Something must be done, and that before night closes in!’

The widow looked at her in silence. That appealing look Mrs. Brame had seen once before on the face of the widow, when the step of the bailiff was heard on the stair: it was directed then only to Heaven, for hope on earth she had none. Now she felt Mrs. Brame had brought deliverance to her, and what might she not do in this freshly risen woe!

Mrs. Brame had soon retaken her seat in the dog-cart in which she had been driven in that day. The wheels sped swiftly along : no need in this vehicle for walking up hill. She was soon at the door ; then within, seeking the Lady Gertrude, whom she found in her morning-room. Mrs. Brame had considered all things in her homeward drive, reflected, weighed, and decided ; and now her hurried step, a flush on her cheek, and a look of disquiet in her eye, awakened Lady Gertrude's concern, seeing her moreover in bonnet and shawl.

'Is the poor widow worse ?' inquired that voice, full of tender solicitude.

Mrs. Brame answered 'No,' but she could not say more, a conflict of feeling overcame her self-possession. In her drive home she had thought on the young girl whose best feelings she had wronged. What if she took the fever and died ? Then how, in such haste of necessity, to make the Lady Gertrude know who she was ? how to tell, in such a moment, the tale of the past ? And then the tones of that voice, breathing the very soul of compassion, quite overcame her, and her only explanation was an outburst of feeling. Lady Gertrude turned from her writing-table and made Brame sit beside her, saying, 'Wait a little ; you will be able to tell me all presently.'

'I am sure I am ashamed of my weakness,' said Mrs. Brame ; 'but there is a dear young thing in the town whom I have long had lying heavy on my mind, for I once wronged her feelings : her father is blind ; he has taken the fever, and is sure to sink under it—a weakly man at best ; and the poor child must take it, for she is his nurse.'

‘Cannot a nurse be found for him?’ Lady Gertrude asked.

‘Yes, but he will not consent; he says a nurse would ruin him. He is poor, they say—an officer, and went blind in India.’

‘If a nurse were sent as from a friend, would he be likely to consent then?’

‘No,’ said Mrs. Brame; ‘it is the waste that belongs to them: they may do their work well, but there are so few that will spare the reckoning that must come at the end.’

‘Do you want to go?’ asked that heart of quick understanding.

‘Yes, I do. I feel now as if I would not lose the opportunity for healing up the wrong I once did her—no, not if it cost me my life. It is not much use I am here. Mercy would do all I do, and more too; but I can nurse night and day. It would be saving the poor child—I feel sure of that; and I would keep away until all danger was past.’

‘You shall go; and I know the desire of your heart will be granted, and you will be given back to us in safety again. When do you wish to go?’

‘The sooner the better,’ Brame replied. ‘I can be ready in half-an-hour.’

‘Not quite so soon; you must promise me you will dine before you go. Take with you supplies of all that may be wanted, and while you are there order anything that may help to save life or ease suffering. What is the address?’

‘That reminds me,’ said Brame, ‘I never noted the address. I must go by Ivy Lane and inquire. How strange, to be sure! I never did such a senseless thing in my life!’

Well, it will comfort up the poor widow to know I shall be there.'

Lady Gertrude's sweetest smile beamed on her old nurse. 'The address will be easily learned,' she said, 'and it is well sometimes to have our heart more awake than our head. Go in hope, it is the pathway of blessing; and it will be surely said to you, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."'

CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. BRAME packed up her wardrobe for nursing, all washing garments; stuffs and black silks were left behind. The butler packed port wine; and the housekeeper, the dear old Scotch Mackenzie, aunt by marriage to Rose, gathered largely all supplies that she thought might be wanted by the sick or the nurses: for she said, 'Tis worth the best thoughts of one to keep the nurses up bonny. And drop me a line when ye are wanting more . . . No, ye need not be after writing; I can guess pretty near, and will send in the store.' So Mrs. Brame was started, with John the groom to drive her, with a fresh horse, to the town. All in the house had gathered, in one way or other, the intelligence that Brame was going to nurse the fever, and they came from all quarters to wish her good-bye; and watched her departing with that unexpressed feeling of hope and desire which breathes from the spirit as prayer, and brings an answer of blessing.

'Mamma, Brame is gone to nurse that young lady with the kitten: won't she be surprised when she sees how kind Brame is grown?'

'Hush, Consy! you must not speak disrespectfully of Brame. She has a dear, noble heart, and we all see it now.'

‘ Why did we not see it before, mamma ? ’

‘ Because there was not the same occasion to call it out. I don’t know any one else who would go in, as Brame has done, to nurse strangers for sympathy in such a fever.’

‘ Would not you, mamma ? ’

‘ I could not, Consy ; because I could not expose papa and you to infection.’

‘ Do you think Brame will see the tortoiseshell kitten that had the little red collar on, mamma ? ’

‘ It cannot be a kitten now, Consy ; and we must all think of the dear child who is nursing her blind father.’

‘ Will she be glad to see Brame, mamma ? ’

‘ I am sure Brame will make every one feel the comfort of her presence before she has been there an hour.’

‘ Must we wait until Brame comes home before we hear all about it, mamma ? ’

‘ It will be a long time before you see Brame again, but I hope she will write to us sometimes, and then you will hear.’

Mrs. Brame alighted at the top of Ivy Lane and walked to Widow Garson’s. There she learned the address, and astonished Widow Garson by saying, ‘ I am now on my way to nurse them myself : so make yourself easy that the best will be done.’

Mrs. Brame delayed not a moment ; but, with the thoughtful care of one acquainted with the infection of certain fevers, she would not let the groom drive her to the door, but took a fly from an inn in the town, and gave orders to John, that whatever parcels were sent in to her were to be left at that inn, as persons fresh from pure

country air were more liable to infection than those who lived in the town where the sickness prevailed.

Arrived at the door, it was opened by a young woman with an anxious face.

‘ Can I see your mistress?’

‘ Yes, ma’am, I believe so : but do you know the fever is in the house?’

‘ Yes,’ replied Mrs. Brame : ‘ but you did right to name it.’

Mrs. Brame was shown into a neat parlour downstairs, and the mistress of the house soon came in, looking pale and fatigued.

‘ I am a stranger to you,’ said Mrs. Brame, ‘ but I am come to assist as a friend in nursing Captain Campbell; for I understand that he objects to having a nurse.’

‘ It will be a blessing, indeed,’ said the mistress, ‘ for we are under the constant fear that Miss Campbell will sicken : she is worn out, and takes nothing. Shall I let her know you are come? She is now in the sick-room.’

‘ Let me bring in my parcels first,’ said Mrs. Brame : so they returned to the door. And when, on labels attached to the hampers, Mrs. Lisson (the mistress) read ‘ H. Clifford, Esq.,’ her respect for the stranger and sense of relief at her coming rose to its height. Mrs. Brame quickly unpacked the store of provisions, arranged them in the coolest place to be found, took out some port wine, laid down her bonnet and shawl, and tying on a white apron, said, ‘ Now take me to Miss Campbell’s sitting-room.’ Mrs. Lisson obeyed, and, leaving her there, hastened to the room where Olivia was watching, and calling her aside said, ‘ You are wanted in the sitting-room ; and I

do believe it is the housekeeper herself come from Squire Clifford's, at the Hall. She has brought no end of good things, and says she is come to nurse Captain Campbell.'

Mrs. Lisson, in her unbounded comfort, could not resist telling all to Olivia, not considering that the sudden tidings might almost disable her, in her weak, unnerved state, for the interview to which she had called her.

Olivia, filled with surprise, entered the room, and looked a moment in silence on the stranger, who stood there in cotton gown and white apron, with all the substantial and comfortable appearance of a nurse. But, softened as the expression of the face was, Olivia remembered it. Mrs. Brame, too, looked on Olivia, who had passed from childhood to youth, and now wore the charm of that first conscious power that comes not until womanhood is expanding the life. Yet the sweet face was the same, though worn with long watches, and its expression full of trust and deep feeling. A flush now passed over her cheek, and giving her hand in greeting she said,—

'Oh, Mrs. Brame, is it you?'

'Yes, my dear,' said Mrs. Brame, who looked now in tender compassion on the young life she had come to save. 'Yes, my dear: who else should it be? How often I have vexed for the unkindness I showed you! But I trust to prove to you now that Nurse Brame has a heart, and is learning in her old days what she might have known in her young time. I am come from my Lady at the Hall to help you nurse your father.'

The surprise, the sudden joy at the never forgotten trouble again springing up into comfort like this, overpowered the weakened frame and exhausted powers of the

young girl, and she sat down for support, unable to speak. A moment more, and Nurse Brame had raised her in her firm arms, laid her down on the couch with a cushion under her head, and covered her feet warmly, saying, 'Lie still; I am going to fetch you something I have, that it is right you should take.' This was said lest Olivia should imagine that Mrs. Brame had gone to her father. She soon returned with eau de Cologne, port wine, and biscuits; first bathed Olivia's burning temples, and then made her drink wine, saying, 'You must not sip the wine, but drink it like water, and it will not affect your head. Now lie quite still until I speak to you again.'

Olivia felt the necessity and the blessing of the voice of authority, and yielded herself to its power. Mrs. Brame opened the more distant window, then, seating herself on the couch, rubbed the tired limbs of the weary girl as if she knew how they ached; and Olivia felt the first sense of rest that had come to her since the fever had seized on her father. Thus revived, after a while she opened her eyes and smiled on Mrs. Brame, who said, 'There, you are better now; but you must eat these two biscuits before you lift up your head.' So the biscuits were eaten.

'Now,' said Mrs. Brame, 'before you get up we can talk over a little what is best to be done.'

'I am afraid,' said Olivia, 'papa is so weak that we can never make him understand your goodness, and he will vex himself and refuse the help.'

'You can call me Letty Dawson,' said Mrs. Brame, 'if Captain Campbell asks who I am, for my maiden name was Letitia Dawson: in his weak state it is better not to raise up remembrance. And say I am one of the household at

Squire Clifford's, used to nursing, and come in as a friend, only to help.'

Olivia still hesitated, though she had risen to go—delayed in the suspense of fear.

'Now don't question with fear,' said Mrs. Brame; 'the right thing can always be done. There is One above makes a way where we cannot. I shall wait at the door: you say what I have told you, then I will follow directly. And you come and lie down here, well covered up, and trust for the rest.'

Olivia tremblingly obeyed. She found her father moaning, as he had done all day, in weary restlessness. She said all as she was desired, and Mrs. Brame then entered at once.

'I am sorry for your illness, sir, and hope I may have the pleasure and comfort of being some help, for I am used to nursing. I see you are restless, but I think we may soon get the better of that.'

'Do you think you can?' said the sick man, weary with tossing, and cheered by the kind, assuring voice.

'Yes, I hope in ten minutes we shall have you asleep.'

Olivia was lingering in joyful surprise. Mrs. Brame stepped to the door and said, 'We are all right. Ask the mistress, or the servant, to come to me for a few minutes at once, and you rest on the sofa. Shut the window and try to sleep.'

'We must make the bed freshly up,' said Mrs. Brame to the mistress, who had quickly come up. 'Will you wait while I fetch up some soft calico sheets I brought with me? Indian people prefer those, I am told.'

Mrs. Brame then laid the sick man in a blanket on a couch, covering him up completely; threw open the window, took down the bed-curtains, and with a towel in her still active arms beat all the close air from the bed and around it: then making up the bed, laid him in, gave him port wine of good quality, such as he had not had before, placed the pillows just supporting the shoulders as well as the head, closed the windows, and sat down to watch him. He breathed in refreshment, his strength reviving, and he slept. The sleep lasted on, and Olivia came in. Mrs. Brame made her sit in the arm-chair, with her feet in another; put the bell within reach of her hand, bade her ring if anything were wanted, then left her to watch.

Going downstairs she carried the cheering report; told the mistress of the house she was come for her tea, and proposed to have it with her; put some of the pleasant food she had brought on the table, and made the poor tired-looking servant take some for her own meal. They all sat down in such quiet as had not been for days, still wondering at the blessing that seemed to have dropped from above. Then inquiring whether Miss Campbell had dined, and finding she had taken no dinner that day, nor any hardly for days, Mrs. Brame said, 'Help me set the table.' Mrs. Brame allowed but little to go up—one wing she cut from a cold fowl she had brought, made one thin round of dry toast, cut a little plate of bread and butter, made the tea, and left the cheerful kettle on the sitting-room fire, before which a very handsome tortoiseshell cat sat contentedly purring. Mrs. Brame stroked the cat with a quiet sigh, but it was a sigh more of thank-

fulness than regret. And leaving all looking inviting she returned to the sick-room.

Olivia was kneeling by the bed, and Mrs. Brame heard the low voice of the sick man say, 'Oh, my child, that sleep how refreshing! It says, does it not, "He giveth His beloved sleep?" "His beloved!" What other words are there that speak of "His beloved?" That sleep I have had brings back a little power to think!'

Olivia gently repeated, 'The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him, and the Lord shall cover him all the day long.'

'May that best blessing be yours, my child! What more?'

'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'

'That is enough,' he said. 'There we may rest, in Jesus Christ, in God's beloved, in whom He is well pleased with us: a rest in life, a rest in death! Will that good friend come back again?'

'Yes: she is here—she will not leave us.'

'Then I will sleep. My child, good night.'

He slept, and Olivia was persuaded to hasten to her tea, persuaded to eat: who could deny the wish of such a friend?

'But who will take care of you?' said Olivia to Mrs. Brame.

'Old nurses understand how to take care of themselves,' she replied. 'I have had a good tea, and you are never to think about me.'

'Only in blessing!' answered Olivia. And Mrs. Brame met the sweet smile that told more than words could convey.

The Doctor came in the evening, and the mistress of the house hastened to tell of the arrival from the Hall.

‘I think,’ said Mrs. Lisson, ‘she must be the house-keeper herself. She is certainly some considerable person: she has brought stores of good things; and the care she takes of one and all is quite uplifting, I am sure.’

‘Then Captain Campbell must be a friend of Mr. Clifford’s,’ said the Doctor.

‘I don’t know about that,’ said Mrs. Lisson, ‘but I always did consider they must belong to a higher place than this; there was that pleasantness about them.’

The Doctor went up to the room; he felt the change before he saw it in the restful looks of his patient. He spoke to Mrs. Brame with the courtesy of his profession, then turned to his patient, saying, ‘I think you look a little better this evening.’

‘Yes, I have slept a long, quiet sleep; a kind friend has been here who understands all that sick people want.’

‘Well, that is the best thing that could have happened,’ said the Doctor. ‘Have you taken the wine I ordered?’

But it was no use to question further, the sufferer lay silent, and Mrs. Brame gave the report. She left the room with the Doctor, and then, in a congratulatory tone, he said to her, ‘You have done what no one else could have done for you — made your own way in here! Too late to save the father; but it may save the daughter: there is no escape for her, the fever is on her. Her devotion to her father for years has been wonderful in one so young; but this illness has been beyond her powers. If I had known they had friends I would have written, for they

seem to have no relations who take any interest about them, and my fear has been her sinking too. Perhaps you can get Miss Campbell to rest in another chamber to-night.'

Mrs. Brame heard in silence. She felt what that child's nursing had been, and now that it could not be long, she feared the evil of separating her from her father would be greater than any good that could result. So she let Olivia have her own little bed in the chamber of sickness, and watched herself through the long hours of night.

So it was for a little while, day and night; but only a little while, the strength of nature was spent, the darkened prison-house of clay must soon release its captive, and the emancipated spirit exult in celestial existence. Once after long slumber he revived and felt his child's hand in his, and said, 'Olivia, my child!' She answered, 'My father!' and he replied, 'A father of the fatherless is God in His holy habitation.' She said, 'Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty;' he murmured, 'Amen.' His hand relaxed its tender grasp, he spoke not again. Mrs. Brame took her seat in the easy chair, supporting Olivia, who knelt by the bed. All was silence awhile, then Mrs. Brame said, 'To depart and be with Christ is far better, and he is gone.' The orphan laid her head on the bosom of Nurse Brame, and her tears burst forth unrestrained.

Mrs. Brame was right; the fever was on Olivia, and weeks of severe illness followed. But life revived again under that maternal nursing, aided by all the remedies that skill and experience could devise. Her first words were, 'My father?'

'In heaven,' Mrs. Brame gently answered.

'How long?' asked Olivia.

'I followed as mourner,' said Mrs. Brame, understanding her thought, 'and all was done as was right it should be for a gentleman, and such respect showed as could be, not knowing his friends.'

'He had none but you,' said Olivia.

Mrs. Brame was deeply touched. Here again there was a trouble she had been sent to relieve, she who had but so lately desired the service of love; and the words of heavenly consolation glanced through her mind, 'There are last that shall be first;' but she feared to think upon them, lest she should not understand them aright, and pride and self in a new form rise up within.

As Olivia by degrees recovered strength, Mrs. Brame learned their history, freely told in confiding gratitude and love by Olivia. When Mrs. Brame found that they had a rich relation, she thought it right that he should be informed of Olivia's present condition, and Mrs. Brame wrote to him herself, not considering it well for Olivia to make the effort in her still weakened state. The rich relation replied, expressing regret, and enclosing a ten-pound note, saying he should not be able to do anything more. In years past Mrs. Brame would have felt indignation and resentment at this, had it occurred in any case awakening her interest; but she had now discovered the hidden evil of her own heart, and felt how varied may be the forms of that same pride and hardness of heart which we may be indulging in ourselves while condemning in others. She read the note and gave it to Olivia, saying, 'We must see the providence of God in what is denied no less than in what is given; if He shuts up one door we may be quite sure it is only His way of constraining us to go in at

another, which, in His own good time, He will open for us.' But Olivia was greatly distressed. 'It is not for the future,' she said, 'that I fear; I can trust for myself. But there must be heavy debts since this illness began, and the thought of their resting on my dear father's memory is agony. Do let me write to my uncle, he surely will have compassion and clear those. We never had a debt before, but these no one could avoid.'

'My dear child,' said Mrs. Brame, 'you are not left friendless in the world; you have not a debt on you, so far as I know, and if there be any unknown to me there is plenty to clear them. What could heal the grief I feel for my close heart and hand through a long, selfish life, like the finding it has all been stored up for you? You need give me no thanks—life is nearly over with me. I have none to need what I have, and the blessing in my old age of not living in vain, but easing the rough way to one over whom life is opening, turns my thanks due to Him who grants it; and you must receive it, because it stands appointed so in the good providence of God.'

And could Olivia repay such kindness? Yes, abundantly, in the filial affection of her own young, trusting life. She had never met maternal tenderness, but the true instincts of her nature led her to know and yield to it now in the love of Mrs. Brame. She opened her life freely before Mrs. Brame's warmly-kindled interest, felt no reserve, held back nothing in silence. This perfect child-like trust responded to Mrs. Brame at the moment when all her sympathies were open to receive it; those sympathies surrounded the orphaned girl, whose young affections twined around them as the fragrant creeper blooms

about the trellis whose strength is extended for its support. Olivia had one sweet memory of aged affection. On her first arrival at her uncle's her grandmother was living, and she poured out her tenderness on the little stranger child; but she was soon taken from earth, and her love only a memory. Olivia recalled it now in fresh recollection, and always called Mrs. Brame by the endearing name of 'Granny.' This pleased the sheltering heart of Mrs. Brame, who watched over Olivia, not with the despotism she had formerly exercised, but with the authority of experience and love.

When Olivia was well enough they went to the sea. The parting was sorrowful from the rooms of long and dear association with her father; even all that had been painful was sacred to her now: but Olivia did not indulge in grief, she felt vividly the release the tried spirit must experience, the emancipation from the darkness, pain, and weariness of years, to the invigoration and light of immortality. Her unselfish love rose on the wing and followed the departed, and rejoiced in his blissful rest; and when she turned to earth, a sheltering tenderness was waiting there to guard her orphaned life and supply all its need. Mrs. Brame had made kind compensation to those in the house, but Olivia bestowed little gifts in remembrance — things that had been added by her to make the rooms more complete in comfort for her father. A few of the most treasured were left in store for herself, and Mrs. Brame said she must now ask for the tortoiseshell cat, and have it kept for her until she returned to the Hall. But when she spoke of return to the Hall her heart misgave her, for the feeling rose, how could she ever part from the sight of

this young life hers had opened to shelter! Olivia could not see her friends of Ivy Lane for fear of lingering infection; but they were happy about her, and she happy for them. And she could talk of them freely, as of all other things, to that compassionate nurse, who had now become her guardian. Sharp, though not seen since the day that he ventured unawares into her door, now shared in Mrs. Brame's respect and regard; and little Sue and the blind basket-maker were adopted as friends.

The weeks at the sea glided peacefully on. Olivia yielded herself to the soothing influence of nature, as she had done to the care of Mrs. Brame. God has gifted nature with a power to soothe, strengthen, and charm the spirit most bowed down by sorrow, if that spirit will yield to its influence. Olivia found invigoration of body and mind. She had been accustomed, in constant life with her father, to pour out her freshness of thought and feeling for him; silent himself, silence oppressed him in her: in this way she was trained in ready expression. This expression flowed around Mrs. Brame, who felt herself in a new world of thoughts, and feelings, and ideas. Olivia was so childlike that her thoughts gushed out clear, and, though Mrs. Brame often looked at her in silence through her large glasses set in tortoiseshell, yet she understood what she meant, and often thought on what she said. Olivia would sing to her as they sat on the shore the hymns and melodies that most pleased her father. Mrs. Brame was not musical; but she loved to hear Olivia sing, read, or speak, on whatever the passing interest might be. For we are all so far gifted with power, if possessed of ordinary ability, that, whatever we take an interest in, we can in

some degree understand and appreciate. Our total ignorance is the result of our total indifference. Whatever Olivia did, or thought, or felt, Mrs. Brame was responsively ready to care for; and in consequence of this, there was an expansion of mind, no less than of heart, in the elder life that guarded the younger; while Olivia was always turning to reflect her own rainbow hues on the maternal friend at her side. Mrs. Brame's eye caught now the sparkling lights on the sea, the soft tints of the clouds, the evening position of stars, as they sat in the darkness and looked from their uncurtained window on the moon-lighted ocean. The forms of shells, sea-weed, and pebbles, with thoughts woven between, all came untaught and unlearned to Mrs. Brame, who caught knowledge by sympathy. But when she saw Olivia draw, and produce a lovely resemblance to sunset at sea, or sunrise, with vessels near or distant, and little boats on the shore, and all this produced with a tiny pallet, and a few broken bits of paints, and a little paper and pencil, Mrs. Brame said, 'This will never do! you must have a proper box, such as I have seen ladies use, who could draw nothing like you;' and Olivia laughed, and kissed the solemn face, that looked as if doubtful whether it could be even allowed her to colour with no show of materials, and said, 'If I had a grand paint-box it might spoil my small skill; if my drawing pleases you, you must let me keep on my old way!' Mrs. Brame on consideration consented, for she felt it completed the wonder. And Olivia said, 'I have heard my mother's drawings were lovely, but she gave them freely away to those who longed for them, not knowing how soon her power must be laid by for higher uses in heaven, so I have

never seen one; but I love to draw because she did, and it is a pleasure that grows by use : but I have not drawn for long, as my dear father felt sad at not seeing what I did ; music pleased and soothed him best.'

' Who taught you, then ? ' inquired Mrs. Brame.

' I had lessons at my uncle's when I was a child, and our master encouraged me ; but my aunt did not like my style, she said it was "too free-and-easy, wanted more study and art," and want of practice must hinder that.'

At length a letter came from Lady Gertrude, saying all fear of infection must be over now, and inviting Miss Campbell to return with Mrs. Brame for a visit to the Hall. Mrs. Brame put on her spectacles, and read and re-read the dear inviting words over and over again. Olivia could not fear to accept it. Mrs. Brame failed not to tell her that she must take her place as a lady in the house, and not think upon longer companionship with her. And when Olivia felt she could not be near her friend, and not with her, Mrs. Brame, by help of explanation and persuasion, showed her the plain necessity for this, and promised to be often with her in her own room, and still to take care of her as her charge, which she never meant to give up.

Olivia expressed to Mrs. Brame the hope that it might help her in hearing of some engagement as a governess, which might not require experience and older years than her own. This Mrs. Brame heard in silence. So they went. And the Lady Gertrude received the orphan girl with a tenderness that made her heart glow in grateful feeling ; for there was in Olivia that refined, retiring grace, that made it easy to draw her near without fear of intrusion.

She bore, too, in her aspect the stamp of a nature fitted to adorn and enrich any home she might enter. Never present when best absent, never absent when wanted, she possessed the true instinct that makes its own way at will. And wherever any shadow rested, any gloom or depression, she had sunshine to shed which touched its objects so lightly that it kindled their cheer unconsciously. Mrs. Brame never ceased her solicitude, anticipating all wants, and more than supplying all the orphan could need. But when Olivia pressed the subject of some employment again, Mrs. Brame named the wish to Lady Gertrude, who spoke herself to Olivia, saying, if happy with them she must, at least for the present, make their house her home; she could, if wishing to be useful, help her with the children, who were ready for more instruction than she herself could always give. And Mrs. Clifford, now about to lose her faithful and attached maid, would be delighted with companionship such as Olivia's; and an allowance should be supplied that would make all feel at ease. This was joy to Olivia, whose youthful spirit was awaking to all the freshness of life's morning, a morning now without clouds; and it gave no less pleasure and satisfaction to all. While from Mercy it lifted the only burden she bore of care for her mistress; for no one could see Miss Campbell devote herself to Mrs. Clifford, though only, at present, now and then for an hour, without the certain assurance that power lay in that young heart to cheer, warm, and brighten the life to which it lent its own.

Soon after Mrs. Brame's return home Constance had whispered, 'Did you see the little tortoiseshell kitten with the little red collar on?' and Mrs. Brame had replied, 'My

dear, it is as handsome a cat as ever walked on four feet, and it is coming home here when all fear of the fever is over !' This fear was over now, and Olivia paid a visit to Ivy Lane. She hastened to her friends, rejoicing their hearts. While she was alone in Ivy Lane, Mrs. Brame stepped into the town, and bought at a saddler's the prettiest little red collar, just the size and quality for a large handsome cat. When Olivia returned to her at the lodgings she saw the tortoiseshell cat, looking full of consequence and conceit, in a red collar and padlock, and she remembered the pains she had taken on that eventful day, long ago, to stitch neatly the strip of red leather, of which she had made the little kitten a collar, that it might look more attractive to the eyes of Mrs. Brame. This little act of effacing tenderness filled Olivia's eyes with the tears of grateful affection, as once before they had filled with the disappointment of hope. She kneeled at Mrs. Brame's knee, and, looking up in her face, said, ' My own dearest Granny ! did you remember that it had one ?' Mrs. Brame said, ' Yes, I could only have it complete !' And the handsome tortoiseshell cat held up his head and shut up his eyes with a look of perfect self-satisfaction : and when amongst the treasures the tortoiseshell cat reached the Hall, and Constance saw it as large as life in a red collar before her, she knew then it must be the very same kitten she had thought of so long, and she danced round it in glee. Mrs. Brame entrusted it to her especial care, and she established it in the room, now called the school-room, as a cat was to be feared in the nursery, on account of the two little mice ; and Constance at length was content.

CHAPTER XIX.

EASTER fell in April, 'sowing her lilies o'er the land;' gleams from sunny skies, on tender foliage of transparent green, with life rejoicing all around. A ray of resurrection glory, beaming from Him in whom all nature lives, wakening each varied form of beauty. That resurrection ray rested upon the tombs and graves of grassy sod: it rested on them, but as yet it might not enter there. The hour was not yet, 'when all who are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth.'

On the green sod that covered the sleeping form of little Tim his mother stood in tender thought upon that Easter-day. And when the sun was sinking, and its western rays glowed on the old tower and window-panes, the Lady Gertrude led Constance and Alfred through the park to the churchyard. They stood by the white tomb and read the name, 'Mary Clifford,' and the day of her departure, and the number of her years; they sat down beside it, and the mother told her children how the young — form resting there had walked in love, how she had cheered — the aged, taught the little children, comforted the sorrowful, and been gentle to all. And Constance said, —

'Mamma, can I ever be like her?'

And her mother answered, —

‘By the love of the same Holy Spirit you can.’

Little Alfred said nothing, but laid his tiny hand on the white stone, and felt near to the sleeper. The sinking sun shone on his young uncovered head, and shed a radiance around it, a light from above; and the mother looked on her boy, and silently prayed that his life might shine ever bright in the light of the Lord.

It was this Easter-tide that William was to claim his promised bride, and preparations on ‘all sides were beginning. Constance and Alfred had made many already. Every now and then they quite forgot all prospect of a parting, a new home, and a wedding; then, suddenly remembering, treasures long packed had to be brought out again to see the light, then reconsigned to paper or box, and hid out of sight. And as Mercy could not be employed in any of these proceedings, Olivia proved exceedingly useful, and a smile of welcome always greeted her in the nursery from the quiet face of that queen of nurses, Betty Cox.

Mr. Clifford had said that the wedding breakfast must be given by himself, and was to be under a tent in the park. This was not for Mercy’s sake alone, though her whole life of faithful service had been devoted to his mother, and was therefore sure to be acknowledged by him, but also as a mark of his respect and regard for William Smith, who held the place of steward of his farms. The day was to be made a festival, for all respected the farm-steward, and many had a tie to him, of grateful feeling for kindness done or sympathy shown them in some time of need. Mr. Clifford also wished to mark his esteem for Mr. and Mrs. Smith, and for their daughter

Rose, who was more beloved and respected, and that with good reason, than any other daughter in the farms around.

Invitations were given with due discretion, and Mrs. Smith had no limit set to the number she was free to invite. Countless visits were paid to the new farm-house at Broadmeads, except by Mercy herself, who did not see her new home before her marriage-day; but her thoughts were turning there with a confidence of love that reposed like a child's on the heart she had trusted.

It was the last market-day before the bridal. William went alone to the town, not to sell corn—he did not take in a sample that day, for other business pressed. There were last stores to lay in, last purchases to make for the home of his bride; there were commissions from his mother, commissions from Rose, things that Molly had thought of, and things remembered by himself. Amongst these last were certain presents he intended to make to the labourers who had long served his father. But on reaching the town, and stabling Black Beauty, the first thing he did was to walk to Ivy Lane. He found all the comfortable appearances of life improved since his former and first visit there. He had brought a plum-cake for little Sue, made by his sister for her. The child was greatly delighted; it was the first plum-cake she had ever possessed: its weight astonished her, and she showed it to Sharp, who looked up in surprise.

Then William said to Benjamin Tovel, 'Tuesday next is my marriage-day, and I wished to make you a little cheer on the day;' saying this, he put ten shillings in gold in the hand of the blind man. Benjamin Tovel thanked him

gratefully, and expressed his own heartfelt desire for the best blessings of this life and that which is to come, both for him and his bride ; and little Sue looked up from admiring her plum-cake, and the spirit light in her eyes, as they were upraised at William, spoke silently to him of a blessing from a higher life than this. And as he turned to go his look of interest lingered on the child, as one sometimes looks unconsciously on the lovely when they are passing away.

‘Molly,’ said Mrs. Smith, ‘just step out here—quick ! Who is that by the side of your master William in the gig?’

Molly strained her sight, shaded her eyes, and said,—

‘My sight ain’t nothing so good as it was. I’ll be bound if I know ! There, now they be by the elms ; I can see them plain enough, but as to who sits in the gig, if you would give me a pound I am sure I couldn’t say !’

Mrs. Smith stood in silence, but her firm lip was quivering ; her eye followed the gig till it stopped at the gate ; then an active form gave a spring, without use of the step, and vaulted over the gate before setting it open for the gig, as if leaping for joy. Mrs. Smith drew her breath quickly, and could no longer see plain ; then a voice loud and clear, as one that often rose above winds and waves, shouted ; ‘There’s mother ! my mother !’ A bound up the green hill, and folding both arms around her, he murmured again those magic words of earth—‘mother !’ and ‘home !’ And William, drawn by Black Beauty, came slowly winding his way, smiling in love on the rapture before him. Rose had heard the shout, and, hastening out to see, joined the welcome. Farmer Smith, in from his

fields, a little spent with the warmth of an Easter-day, had dropped off asleep in his high-backed arm-chair, but woke up as he thought to the vision of a dream! There was no end of welcomes: the labourers, with their baskets slung over their shoulders, just stopped at the garden-gate, now on their way home from the day's work, to shake hands with Master Ted, and they all said the same kind words, one after another, 'Glad to see you safe home, Master Ted, and hope you hold well.' And Ted made answer to each, and gave a sailor's grasp of the hand; and Dony, who had not long been promoted to the high office he held, stood in full view, and said, 'I be cow-boy to my mistress now, Master Ted.' And Sukey, who, as well as Dony, was a child of one of the farm-labourers, managed a look out from the cow-house as each cow filled her pail, and said to herself, 'Master Ted won't know that I am to stand as whole-maid up at Broadmeads when my master William gets married!' And Ted turned at length from all the greetings around, from human hearts and hands, and the dumb creatures gifted with memory of friends, and said to his mother, as he sat down by her side to tea, — 'Oh, mother, the old ocean could never fill the heart of your boy if it were not for the home he comes back to on land!' So Ted would be at the wedding, and this was a gift dearer than all costly adornments to enrich the occasion.

Answers to invitations had arrived at the farm. Mr. Samson Smith in London had been asked, on this happy occasion of the eldest son's wedding: but Mr. Samson Smith had inquired who the bride was, and when he found it was a portionless maiden, once a poor village child, he

replied that he 'thought his nephew might have looked higher than that; he must beg himself to be excused from the wedding:' but Samson intended to come. Farmer Smith looked distressed at this letter from his brother, and said, 'I thought he would take it up and stand against it like this. 'Tis certain our boy has not looked out for this world !'

'And what's the need that he should?' replied Mrs. Smith. 'He may leave that to them that have no Promise to lean on. I say, William has taken the God above at His word, for is it not written, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you?"'

'Ah, wife, you see farther than I do, I fear. I am always looking after the bit of the way we have to tread here, and you look clean over to what lies beyond.'

'Not wholly so, neither,' Mrs. Smith replied; 'but this I do hold to, that the good part the Bible minds us of, brings the lesser part with it; leastways it does so unless it be ordered different. I reckon we have to make it our concern to choose that good part, and trust for all that may follow.'

The next answer was from Mrs. Smith's brother, Mr. Benson, the Derbyshire farmer, saying that it would give him the greatest pleasure to come and spend a week with his sister, and bring his wife and eldest daughter to attend his nephew's wedding, to whom he wished all joy on the happy occasion. This promise gave great comfort to Mrs. Smith and joy to Rose, who was warmly attached to her Derbyshire relatives, and had learned much in time past from association with them.

Joe, of course, was to come from the merchant's office in London ; for what preparations could be happy without expectation of him ! But great was the surprise, and even a slight consternation was felt, when, only two days before the wedding, the following letter was received :—

‘ MY DEAR MOTHER,—Don't be alarmed if an unexpected guest should accompany me to-morrow. My good friend, Mr. Merridew, says he has been talking for years of a visit to father and you, and he thinks that no time could be better than this. He is the truest-hearted, noblest old fellow that ever made a fortune. As soon as ever I told him that William was going to marry, he would have it all out, as like as could be to those years long ago, when William first met him on the top of the coach. So I told him all; gave him Mercy's history from the days of her childhood; and when I chanced to say that I thought William's love first grew out of pity, he looked daggers at me, and said, “Take right estimates, man. I know that brother of yours well, and I can answer for him he has chosen a woman he can reverence in love.” He looked so serious that I believe he thought he was teaching me how to wed. But, mother dear, he is coming down with me to-morrow, outside the coach. Don't let it flurry you; he hates preparations, and will like it the better if he has to fare as he can. He says I am to tell you an easy chair will do for him all the same as a bed. What a party we shall be! What kindly comfort will grow out of this wilful marriage of my parental brother Will! Look out for us, mother, but not the whole day. We cannot be with you until near upon six. Now I must to business; but I don't

know how it is, I never can settle when I am reckoning on home. Love to my father; he and Mr. Merridew will be close friends, I am sure, by when an hour is over. Tell Ted that I leaped over bales in the warehouse as high as a ship, not including the topsail, when I heard he was come.

‘Your dutiful, affectionate Son,
‘JOSEPH SMITH.’

Mrs. Smith and Rose hastened their best inventions in way of preparation, and soon made comfortable arrangements for all. These were not the only guests expected. A friendship had now long grown up between Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Mansfield. Jane Mansfield had been several times on a visit to the farm, and each year strengthened the mutual regard. Mr. and Mrs. Mansfield were invited to come. Jane could not accompany them, as she did not return home at Easter; and the eldest son could not leave the business in his father’s absence: but Mr. and Mrs. Mansfield were most happy to come.

Mrs. Smith had continued to wear, as her best dress, a gown of black silk; and she always did manage to get all her dresses, bonnets, and shawls, with some tinge of mourning about them, though no sorrowing words passed her lips now for her child in the skies. But as Easter drew on, one evening, when Rose was at the Hall, and her father had dropped asleep in his chair, as he often did when the day’s toil was over, William had said to his mother,—

‘Easter-time minds us of life, don’t it, mother?’

‘Yes, lad; you didn’t think I misdoubted of that?’

‘ No, mother.’

Now Mrs. Smith never liked a meaning that did not at first sight appear, and William knew this ; but, somehow or other, he felt at a loss in what he wanted to say, feared not gaining his point, it might be.

‘ What, then, are you after ?’ said Mrs. Smith. ‘ Speak your meaning out, if you have any.’

‘ Well, then, mother, it is your best dress I was thinking of ; that black silk always will have a sad look to me. I suppose it is because you have worn one ever since we lost little Tim ?’

‘ And is not the poor child worth that one small remembrance ?’ asked Mrs. Smith, mournfully.

‘ Oh, mother, not a dark memory ; the thought of him must be bright. I sometimes think I almost see him a happy angel above.’

‘ Ah, son, that’s all right and true enough for you ; but I, who broke his young heart, if ever mother did, ought to go mourning for my child to the grave.’

‘ Now, mother, I do believe it is that black gown keeps up those dark thoughts in you. I doubt if ever children loved a mother better than yours have loved you. And as to little Tim, there can’t be one that loves you like him, for his love is one now with the love of God.’

‘ I have the hope of forgiveness,’ Mrs. Smith said, still speaking in sorrow.

‘ I am sure, mother, you know more about these things than I do ; but yet it does seem to me you take that up the wrong side, as if forgiveness were a thing that held one off at a distance, instead of being just that that brings us nighest of all. Sure there can be no place so near to

the heart of our Father as that place made there by the blood of His Son, for them He has forgiven ! As I take it, mother, there is no love up in heaven so deep and so tender as love that has forgiven.'

'Well, Will, I believe you are right in the main. What! did you want to dress up your mother in gay colours again?'

'No, mother, not to say gay; but do you just look here, mother, this dark, handsome, plum silk — that's my fancy for you. I was always looking about, in shops and out, till I fixed my eye on this. I saw in a minute it was just the thing that I wanted. I went in, and said, "Just let me have that silk;" and I bought it outright, without asking the price. A thing that I don't know that I ever did before.'

'Tis handsome, my son; I will have it made up, and put it on for that day, and stand your father's surprise, for I am sure he won't know me.'

'I don't know, mother: I am pretty sure, for my part, if we put you on a queen's robes you would look yourself still. But will you wear it on Sundays too, mother? My first look will be always for you, when Mercy and I come to church.'

'I will, if it don't look too fine; and it shall keep me in mind that forgiveness is heaven!'

And now on this evening, two days before the wedding, Mrs. Smith called her son William to her room, and opened a drawer; there, folded up with lavender, lay the plum-coloured silk, ready-made as a dress, with white muslin ruffs for the wrists, and a large new white neckerchief, folded ready in plaits; and in a bonnet-box be-

side it a black satin bonnet, trimmed up with black lace; and, done up in a parcel, a white crape shawl, that Joe had sent down for the mother to wear. And William looked on them with a smile as admiring as if they had been the attire for his bride.

Samson was expected to arrive with Joe and Mr. Merridew. The influences over Samson's life had not been calculated to call to the surface any deep feeling that might be within. He had been a boy of steady purpose, and he was the same as a man. He would have stood in the lines amidst a shower of grape-shot unmoved, but he could not throw a glow over the surface of life by expression. He had been sent early to London. His uncle was a man of honourable principle in business, but the love of money had grown upon him with the rapid increase of money; and this soon tarnishes nobleness of character, and deadens all grace. Samson made no independent friends; in business hours he worked steadily, in quiet hours he read. His gay London cousins called him their plough-boy relation; but he never resented their mirth, and was always ready to render them any kind service. He had a grave and rather absent aspect; and though he seemed to notice little, it was a fact that he always quietly did what no one else liked to do, and repaired, or tried to repair, what others left undone. This was too readily concluded to be because he had no personal choice, and he gave occasion to this feeling by expressing himself as if things were all much alike to him. Every one reckoned on Samson doing the right thing, but he lacked the buoyant spring that gives action a grace, and the polish of the gem reflecting light from all around.

When Samson heard of his brother's engagement he wrote one of his usual stiff letters, of some five or six lines, expressing, in correct words, his wish that they might be happy. He then waited until the suitable time to give gifts, at which time he sent down a shop-bale containing a stock of household linen of all sorts, and with it this note:—

‘DEAR WILLIAM,—I thought a supply of household linen might be of use to you now. I hope you will like what I send, and accept it as a wedding gift from me. With my love to father and mother,

‘I remain, your affectionate Brother,

‘SAMSON SMITH.’


As Mrs. Smith unpacked the bale, and took out the varied store, she said, ‘People may say what they like of Samson, but I am sure there is kind feeling here.’

‘Oh, mother,’ answered William, ‘who ever doubted Samson’s kind feeling? I should think him just the man who never felt unkindly.’

Mrs. Smith was silent, but this praise did not please her. To her it implied that Samson lacked strength of character. She thought otherwise; but what she could not establish she always held in silence. And little did even his mother guess how Samson had pondered on what gift might be best to express his good wishes, and meet the wants of his brother—how the bale, that looked like a shop-order sent down, had in each separate article been selected by him, compared with all others in the

shop, and finally chosen as best for its purpose. Feeling as yet wandered at large in his unexplored heart, and found no voice nor language which others understood. But all was warmth in his home, and if not fully appreciated, he was never chilled in that circle of love.

The next day, the day before the wedding, Mrs. Smith went over for the last arrangements at Broadmeads, and left Rose to complete all things at home. Sukey was already in her situation at the new farm, and thought herself a person of great importance there; 'for,' said Sukey to herself, 'who but I could have made all the things look like this, brought up to it as I have been under Molly and my mistress, Mrs. Smith? There is not a girl, take the whole country round, that could have done it without such a bringing up as that; and I am sure I don't know that they could have done with it, for it is much to stand up to when you come to consider. I should think I best know what the state of the boards was; I almost wish now I had left a small corner, just to show that people who come might know how Sukey can scrub. Then look at the bricks, so to speak, fit to dine off! and the windows, I have not left a speck that does not belong to them. Then only to see how goods and chattels come in! I have no sooner set the new milk-pails in a row, and stood looking a minute to see their rims shine so bright, than I hear a clatter of pans, and, "Sukey, take this!" I have scarce settled them when it's "Sukey, you are wanted!" and if there isn't a man with a cart and the wash-killers come! Then up comes another cart with two dozen of poultry under a net, and one flying out this way, and another gone




that; and such a chace, right and left, as I never had before! Then mistress opens the linen—such linen, to be sure! all made and marked by Miss Rose. I saw the letters on, all set three-cornered ways—W., M., and an S. underneath. How some people do rise, to be sure! but I suppose 'tis a true sign they are the best, like the cream on the milk—that stands proof from nature! And for certain it is so, for they say there is not a tongue in the place but would speak up a good word for her; and, in course, for Master William too,—but all the world must know that. Well, by this time to-morrow she will be mistress to me! Of course she knows proper ways, and so will fancy mine, as they come from them who must know better than she can what belongs to a farm. I dare say we shall soon have the gentry up here, when we are all settled in. They say Madam Clifford is certain to come, and I think 'tis likely she will note how things are done: I don't mean the new things—that's no merit of mine; but Madam will know when boards are well scrubbed, and how bricks look when clean. And then those sweet pretty children, I long to see them come in; and that young lady come lately, I have only seen her at church: but what a heavenly face she has, to be sure! just one as if I were dying, as I was last year, I should dearly love to see near me, and hear her speak those same words that did sink into me then. But I must go a-milking! How nice my dairy does look!—just fit for a princess! The new churn, and the clothes-dolly, and the big scales on bright chains, and the pans all in a row. 'Tis a pity to use these new pails, to be sure; but I suppose, when folks marry they like nothing that's old. I don't know how things are

ordered then, because I never was a bride, though I may be some day, if Johnnie keeps true; and I do believe he will; only he wishes to save, and do well by his mother, and so I do by mine, for they be both widows, and there's been a deal of trouble for them. But I won't think any longer, or work will never be done!'

Mrs. Smith had returned to the farm, and the evening drew on. She had on her black silk, for it was only the eve of the wedding, but she gave William a smile when he saw it—one of her rare smiles, that to her children always kindled a light that could almost turn black to white. The weather was not cold, but Mr. Smith said travellers might be, and the bright flames were creeping over logs laid in order. The long tea-table was set with the best the farm could produce; the front door was open; wheels were heard, then pleasant voices. Mr. Smith hastened out—the travellers were come. William had taken his young favourite Nora to drive Mr. Merridew, and borrowed another gig in which Joe drove Samson home, drawn by Black Beauty. In came the travellers with greetings on all sides, welcomed by Mr. Smith and the Derbyshire uncle. Mr. Smith and the aunt, the aunt's daughter and Rose, the four sons, were all there; and the presence of the genial London merchant seemed the crown of the whole.

And where was the elected bride? Tears had dimmed her eyes that day, and when alone she wept—wept at leaving her beloved mistress, the Lady Gertrude, the children, and those elder servants of the house to whom she had been as a child; she thought of her new home so near, and feared for the first time as its day approached.



The preparations seemed great, and though she knew the honour was for William, yet he had chosen her. Let her tears flow to-night; they fall from a cloud gathered up from her heart's deep affections, and sunshine will be hers on many a to-morrow.

CHAPTER XX.

THE sun of the next day arose behind a grey bank of clouds, concealing his brightness, while the dawn walked the earth, gently waking all nature, before the sun shot his dazzling beams from the clearer depths of the sky. The voices that answer the call of the dawn are the purest and happiest that rise up to heaven. The birds with their anthem of praise, the bleat of the fold, the lowing herd of the field, the step of the early labourer, and the sounds of the farm. And, higher far than these, prayer awakens with the dawn: the early horsemen first of all the village labourers arise, breathing from scattered cottage homes the heart's incense to heaven; then gathering numbers awake, and multitudes kneel. Earth pleads, and Heaven answers in blessing. If our eyes were opened to behold the vast circle of prayer as the dawn lightens the regions of land and sea, from the hoary head bowed in adoration to the babe lisping in praise, we should feel ourselves, while still on earth, as one of the 'multitude no man can number, giving glory to God and the Lamb.'

At the farm no labourers came up to work, the day was a festival; wages were paid, but each was his own man that day. Mrs. Smith was up betimes, even earlier than usual; but not so early as William. He left the

house still sleeping, and turned out into the grey of the morning. That day was the farewell to the dear home of his lifetime, the welcome to another new and untried. That day he turned from his mother, and the father whose pleasant voice in all business questions would answer, 'Ask Will;' but the smile of the future gathered its light from the past; and when as the hour fixed for the farm breakfast drew on he came in, and met the greetings of all, that light beamed on his face, silently telling that he had been like one of old when awaiting his bride—walking in the fields to meditate and pray.

The London merchant rose early; opened his white-curtained windows; met the breeze of the morning from the ploughed land, and from over the primrose and violet banks, and the woods where the palms were in bloom; heard the rapture of the birds from the copses below—that passion of song that awakes a soft Easter morning—and looking out from his window, he saw Rose in her farm-gown of blue print, with her white pigeons flying to her hand as she stood on the green turf. 'Peace be to this house!' he said; 'for the Son of Peace is surely here!' and he turned from his open windows to the large white easy chair by the little round table, where his Bible lay. Hearing Joe's cheery voice below, Mr. Merridew went down, and was soon engaged inspecting farm arrangements with him and his father. The early breakfast hour was approaching; Mr. and Mrs. Mansfield had arrived; William had just come in at the front door; but where was Ted? one voice answered another, still asking 'Where?'



'I only hope he is not up to some mischief,' said Mrs. Smith, in her old tone of suspicion.

'Now, mother,' answered Joe, 'you know very well Ted left all his mischief in the first wave of the sea.'

Mrs. Smith shook her head in significant doubt. Nothing could be done, because Ted was not in.

'There he is, I declare!' said William, 'flying home on young Nora!' And William hastened out in no little alarm.

The sailor-boy bestrode the spirited creature without saddle or bridle, only halter in hand, as he had loosed her from her stall; and two empty sacks, fastened in the middle, dangled one on each side. Ted rolled himself off just as William appeared, while all were looking on in anxiety from within and without. Nora's sides were white with foam, and her fiery nostrils distended.

'What a pace she does go!' said Ted; 'twenty knots to an hour! At least pretty near that, some part of the way.'

'You wild sailor!' said William, 'I shall lock the stable-door; you can't ride my horses as free as the white horses of the old sea.'

'Now, Will, didn't she go her own pace to her pleasure? I never so much as once churruped her on.'

'Hers would be a run-away pleasure,' said William, as he patted Nora, and led her away; 'the wonder is, you and my best horse are not both broken-knee'd.'

Ted hastened on to set the stable-door open, and as he saw the fine creature enter he said, 'I do think I was clever to bring her safe home; I had a little business that

was in haste to be done, and I thought she would be the fastest cutter, so I just gave her the run.'

All now quieted down for the sweet worship of home; and when the psalm was sung the voice of the broad-chested sailor-boy rose in the midst, like the tones of old ocean in some cavern haunts of the sea.

When breakfast was over and the party scattered awhile, to meet again presently on their walk to the church, Mr. Mansfield said, in low confidence, to Mrs. Smith, 'I can give a guess what your sailor-son was after. He was in at our shop yesterday buying whole pounds of our best tea—I can't say how many—and sugar to match. I know I thought the bill would be large, and suggested quarters instead, or half-pounds at least, supposing they were for gifts; and he replied, "Now, that would be mean, cutting the old folks down like that upon Will's wedding-day!"' So, without more inquiry, it was easily discovered that Ted had been his round of the parish on Nora with sugar and tea, and reports of those who had seen him flying fast with his sacks depending on each side, and the horse looking wild, were not slow in coming in, as, in their love for the sailor-boy, many feared for his safety. And when after breakfast his mother said, 'Ted, take care of your money,' he answered, 'Then, mother, I must give it to you;' and turning out both his pockets he went penniless that day. William went to the stable in quiet concern to see what could be done for young Nora, for Josh, the house-servant, had gone over to Broadmeads, no one seemed to know why, and there was no one else in the way. But on the stable-door hung a coat, and when William went in, there was

Samson, with shirt-sleeves turned up, grooming Nora's hot sides, as well as if he had never left the farm life for the London counter

'Now, Samson, this is too bad!'

'Not at all,' said Samson; 'it just pleases me. What a rogue that Ted is! he is none the better for sea!'

'I am afraid the old sea spoils him too, like all the world besides,' said William. 'She won't hurt now, Samson; this was good of you!'

'You don't want to think about her now, nor me either,' said Samson; 'you be off, and I'll follow.'

There could be no visits paid on this marriage morning to the new farm-house, but all had been arranged there before, and it awaited in peaceful repose the evening arrival of the bridegroom and the bride. Sukey awoke early that morning, but rather in a flurry, and said to herself, 'There, now, if it wasn't that new clock that woke me! What a voice it has got! It frightened me for a minute, it was so like the call of my mistress—my "old mistress," must I say now?—Mrs. Smith; when I have taken a little nap after Molly was up, and it sometimes would last a minute more than it should. And time I should be up now, for I am sure none can say what I have to do before sunset to-day. By that time I shall see the bride and bridegroom drive in. I don't suppose it can make any change in them that's particular, and yet folks do seem to consider brides and bridegrooms a sight. They do say the men are going to ring for good-will, Master William is such a favourite with one and another; so they have banded together that they won't take a penny, and they mean to ring such a peal that the whole country will

hear. Well, 'tis no use saying that poor folks can give nothing; let the bells answer that when we hear them ring! I suppose I shall get no wedding-bells rung; but two hearts will be glad, and that's music as good. I don't mean mine and Johnnie's, but his mother's and mine, and they be both widows; so that's better than bells. But I'll think no more of that. Why, there be the cows, and I have not opened a shutter! Well, it is only just five, and they won't marry till ten; and then they won't be making their way out here till the sun begins to decline, because they are all to tramp over the fine park and gardens just wherever they like. Well, I must say, "God bless them on their marriage-day!" and me, a poor girl, and make me ready for mine; and keep me in true honest ways all the days of my life by His grace from above (for I can't do it myself), and forgive me my sins; and keep Johnnie out of all harm; and bless my dear mother, for she is a widow! This I pray, for the sake of Jesus my Saviour. Amen. There, I shall never be behind time for that! I have heard say, "No one ever lost time by a prayer." I do believe it is true; for when I have slept late, and run down without, work has dragged on heavy all day. I have told Johnnie so, and he said he had minded the same when he had stepped out without kneeling to pray.

'Now, Jessy, and Rosebud, and Cheery, and Pippin! What do you call that young cow out there, boy?' 'Lady-bird.' 'Oh, yes; I remember it now: I must be up in their names for my young mistress to-morrow. There flows the sweet milk, and well it may in such a pail. I wonder whether Johnnie will wear a favour to-day? They

say the men will who wait, and Johnnie is sure to be one. I know he will lay up his favour for me, it might turn up again on our own wedding-day; he ought to wear a favour when he marries me! There now, if I didn't say I would think no more of that! Now, Rosebud, move out, and let Ladybird in. You will all have a bride for your mistress to-day. How cheery the morn is! just fit for a bride. When I think on it, it does make me wish I were there. How fine Master William will look, to be sure! Molly just gave me a sight of what he was to wear: new top-boots, a blue coat, blue neck-tie, and white waistcoat, with the smallest little blue flowers sprinkled over like print. But they say the stuff was called jean, and the flowers blue "forget-me-nots." If they be so, it was a way of speaking without words to his bride! I wonder how Johnnie will look when we marry? There, now! 'tis no use resolutioning more. And what call can there be that I should not think of Johnnie? I am right sure all the day he will be thinking of me, and have tales to tell me as good as if I had been there. Well, now I have done milking; I have had no breakfast yet. I won't stay about that; I can feed by-and-by, when the dairy work 's done: then there will be a minute to sit and consider. There springs up a lark! that's a good sign, they say. No bride is so blithe as that bird of the sky, singing into the blue. Sure that must be to learn us there can be no cheer like the straight way to heaven, and the call may come for me before ever I be a bride. Let me bethink me of that, that I may strive to be ready.

The hour for the marriage was half-past ten, and

at ten by the farm clock, always fast, the bridegroom's party set out. They crossed some pleasant meadows, a nearer way than the road, and more retired from view. The meadows opened into a lane that led up the hill to the church. The party walked at large, and talked one to another; only William had his mother, and she leaned on his arm. There stood the old church-tower on the hill, half shaded by trees! Mrs. Smith thought how unchanged it looked since that morning, at the spring-tide of the year, when she bore William in her arms, her first-born, to his baptism. Again she thought how her sad eyes rested on it when she first trod that pathway to the grave of little Tim. The old church-tower looked the same, but how much nearer now seemed the heaven above it! On this morning, full of a peaceful mingling of joy and sadness, to her it seemed as if the blue sky bent low over the old tower in the sympathy of love, and she felt as if looking up straight to the dwelling-place of God, through the mantling clouds of white, into the depths of the blue beyond. William's thoughts were on earth; they had entered the church, and he fancied that already he saw the dear form arrayed in her simple garments there, ready to devote herself to him, and with him to God.

And now they reached the lane, crossed the bridge of one plank, where a streamlet rippled clear, and climbed the hill. The great elms stretched their branches overhead, all tipped with leaflets of the spring, while thousand wild flowers in the banks gemmed the soft green in which they nestled. William stopped on their way, arrested by the perfume of the violets; he gathered two or three,

and laid them in the white folds of his mother's neckerchief, then, plucking a primrose with its leaf, he slipped it in his button-hole, and said,—

‘I like this flower right well : it is the first of spring, and blooms in bitter winds and under dreary skies. I have seen it peeping up from out the snow. I’ll wear it now for Mercy’s sake ; for I believe, mother, that’s how she’ll live for me.’

They were early at the church, for William had started at the time at which his mother thought it right to go ; but the neighbours were already gathered or gathering there : the church was filling fast, and village men in Sunday dress were waiting near the porch.

‘You see we are late,’ said Mrs. Smith to William : ‘I knew we should be !’

‘No, mother, not late ; our time is good by half-an-hour yet : look up, see, there’s the clock will tell you that.’

William was not prepared for all the gathered throng, and he felt his mother trembling on his arm. The men bowed silently as they passed through. Jem, too, was there in waiting by the door, to give his niece away, and Patience at a little distance, with Alice clinging to her hand, and little Willy in her arms. The fatherly clergyman, who knew and loved them all, was there already, and came forward to take them to the vestry ; there he talked awhile with the elder friends, but William stood in the chancel awaiting his bride, and his mother knelt beside him, and as she knelt she wept.

And now came the bridal party, the old servants of the Hall attending Mercy Jones. When entered they

divided, and showed her in the midst leading little Maud, with Constance and Alfred attending on her. Constance and little Maud wore their robes of white, with a long sash of blue, and Alfred wore a vest of blue. They led her on in full persuasion, it was evident, that she was given into their care to-day. Jem, seeing this, held back, and the sunbeam of a smile glanced down the ranks of faces looking on at the bride encircled by such attendance. A few moments more and Mrs. Clifford entered, leaning on the arm of her son—it was her wish to be present at the marriage of her favourite maid; and the Lady Gertrude and Olivia followed. They went into the Squire's pew in the chancel, and the service began. Little Maud had not been in the church since the day of her baptism, but her presence on this occasion could not be denied; and standing in the full light of all the grave, kind eyes of the elder servants of the Hall, her good behaviour could not be doubted. She climbed up on the step by which they stood, and placed herself between Mercy and William, facing all her assembled friends.

When the minister said, 'Who giveth this woman away?' and Jem replied, 'I do,' Alfred looked rather displeased, and moved his place of standing to one between Mercy and Jem. Mercy put her glove into little Maud's hand, as she showed some signs of thinking the time sufficiently long, and a little voice very audibly said, 'Tank 'ou;' she then immediately wanted the ring, and made a slight remonstrance at not obtaining the treasure. Mrs. Cox put up her finger, saying, 'Hush! hush!' and little Maud looked up at the bride and bridegroom, repeating, 'Hus! hus!' Unnecessarily alarmed, Mrs. Brame, with

something of her old tone of authority, said, 'Be quiet!' Little Maud looked at her, then, appearing to understand that silence was required, she looked up again, and with an attempt at Mrs. Brame's emphasis, said, 'Be criat!' Mercy was in no way disturbed by the sweet echo so familiar below, and William only thought it added to the beauty of all; but Mr. Clifford said to Lady Gertrude, 'Shall I take her away?' Lady Gertrude shook her head, knowing separation was impossible now, and this had induced Mrs. Cox to let her stay; in truth, it only completed the charm, for when events are in themselves bright and happy, slight incidents take the same colouring, and blend in the harmony.

The sacred service completed, the names entered and witnessed by Mr. Clifford and the London merchant, William led out his bride, little Maud shaking her head when desired by Mrs. Cox to give up the glove; so the ring went uncovered, and all might see its bright gold. Many hands worn with labour were thrust out to William's for a friendly grasp, and kindly benedictions fell on them as they passed; and the aged merchant following, looked round in heartfelt delight. Mr. Clifford had hastened out alone, and he now made William put his bride into the carriage and drive with her to the Hall; so William and Mercy had those few moments alone, while the bells smote the air and the swift-footed horses bore them on through the park.

Far and near flew the tidings on the brazen wings of the bells; the old people, too aged or too sickly to walk, heard the peal, and put on their tea-kettles, and took out their whole pounds of tea—few had ever possessed a

whole pound before—and with love for the sailor-boy, and thoughts for bridegroom and bride, they put in an added spoonful above the usual allowance, and prepared for their feast at home, whose only luxury was tea. The bells broke on Molly's ear at the paternal farm.

'God bless them!' she said. 'How I remember his birth, and the fancy my mistress always had for little Mercy! That child never angered her, let what else might go wrong; it must have been the token of this that was for to come. And then, that the orphan should be taken up by Madam Clifford, and trained in that understanding and those pleasant ways, it must have been all the while ordering for this.'

'There go the bells!' said Sukey, at Broadmeads; 'what a peal!—they go right to my heart; such a glad, solemn sound! I could sit down and cry, only that might be a hurt to the bride, for they say you should not shed tears under sound of marriage-bells. How I should like to be there! But Molly is not gone, so I could not expect. We are the responsables, and must stay at home. I wonder how the bride feels? They say she was an orphan, and I had a father and mother; but, it may be, He above thought the more upon her, for He do notice the lonely, and takes care for them who have none to look to but Him. Still I am glad I have a mother, for 'tis wonderful cheering when I see her come in, or I step over to see her and sit down by her side, and tell out to her just how all things be; and she sees light in the dark, and can turn a crooked thing straight, as no one else can, not even Johnnie, for he blames all folks but me; and though I do like to stand clear with him, I know it ain't right, and so it don't

do me the good that mother's true downright words do. And yet, for all that, she never seems to blame, but orders it so that all turns for the best. I suppose that's because it's my mother! Johnnie is often saying he and I will pay the rent for our mothers, and keep the bit of garden gay, with sauce growing at the back, and little things handy. Dear me, I wish it were now! but I must work my way first. Johnnie has saved twenty pounds, and I only three; but now I am in a real place I shall do a deal better: and Johnnie knows I am young, and says that's a plenty for me. How early I have done all the work, to be sure! it's dull when there is none to make any more. I think I will travel once over the house, and give a look at all things again; there may be some oddments still to be done, though my mistress—my old mistress, I mean—is such a one to leave the ground clear as she goes. I would set up a posy, but the bride will have flowers, and 'tis certain she will like her own posy the best. How pleasant her room lies! right facing the sunrise; and then, from the other window, looking out where he sets; and over the yards all new-covered with straw, and the buildings all round, a home for each kind. How the dog pricks his ears! he can't know about weddings; and yet one would think he was listening to the bells. The horses, too, must consider that they have two Sundays this week, and not far out neither, for it does seem sacred and solemn; and yet there is gladness, and the sunshine looks happy. How wonderful neat all things look here! and the dimity curtains as white as the snow; but the boards, the strength of my arm lies in them! There is everything neat, best chamber and all. Now I will lay out my new dress—I must not put

it on until afternoon; yet my work is done, and who knows but Johnnie might come! So I think I will put it on, then I can sit down and sing — it will pass time away.

‘There, now I am ready, let who come that will! But what ought I to sing? It should be a wedding-song, and I only know one that I bought of a pedler last year; it is rather affecting, but that may be as well:—

“Hark! it is the marriage-bell!
Sweetly raised o’er wood and fell:
Hark! it is the marriage-bell!

With the morning rose the bride,
Donn’d her veil, her blue knot tied:
Fair as morning was the bride.

Speeding fast o’er hill and dale,
Blood drops on his coat of mail:
Rides the bridegroom faint and pale.

Fouly pierced by foeman’s dart,
He would reach his bride’s warm heart,
Ere his soul and body part.

Fainting in her arms he lay,
And she wiped the blood away,
Kissed his lips as cold as clay.

On her breast he leaned his head,
And his noble spirit fled:
Toll the bell for bridegroom dead!”

‘Tis melancholy, and not so pretty as I thought. I wish I knew a better; yet the tune is good. Johnnie says he don’t consider pedlers’ songs are worth the singing. I mean to settle my mind not to buy any more.’

The carriage had conveyed the bridegroom and bride to the Hall door. On alighting they saw the company coming down the slopes from the church; they walked on to

meet them, and were soon lost amidst surrounding friends. When greetings and good wishes had subsided again into the hearts that warmly expressed them, a survey of the park and gardens began. A large tent crowned an elevation from which a lovely view opened in the distance, and in the foreground lay the lake, shaded here and there by the trees that had for centuries hung over it, their early foliage mirrored in its waters, and the leaves of autumn strewn in its deep bed. Mrs. Smith soon missed her sailor-boy, and her eye looked around in disquiet: he was discovered on the lake, in a fragile canoe that Mr. Clifford allowed no one to enter but himself. But Ted glided over the water with a speed so swift and a balance so true that Mr. Clifford, who, hearing the outcry, came down to see, looked on with a personal pleasure.

‘Oh, papa, may I go?’ asked little Alfred.

‘Not alone,’ answered Mr. Clifford.

‘I will take him,’ said William; ‘I can swim a little, and our sailor-boy like a fish.’

So the light canoe, which had two seats, drew to shore. William took his seat, with Alfred on his knee; the strong arms of the sailor seemed regardless of weight, and the light bark skimmed the lake like the wing of a wild bird. Mercy stood watching, and owned to herself that she never before felt afraid of the water. Many a swift row was given: the London merchant himself took a circuit, and the Derbyshire farmer, but Mr. Smith declined the excursion. The attraction was great, but the bell rang for the repast. The company invited moved on to the tent, while the villagers found seats on the grass, and baskets of good cheer were brought out to them.

In the tent the table was set out in plentiful style, adorned with fair flowers, and a bride-cake in the centre. The Rector sat by Mrs. Smith, who still esteemed him her best friend. The merchant sat by Lady Gertrude's right hand, and the Derbyshire uncle on the left: they were both men of most agreeable manners and superior intelligence. The Lady Gertrude, though somewhat silent herself, possessed the power of drawing others out; and the conversation was full of mutual interest and pleasure. Mr. Clifford undertook the far more difficult task of making conversation general; but he lived heart to heart with those around him: he had cared for their welfare, personal, relative, and social, and they had responded; for he understood the right balance, by which he did not lay himself out alone, but led others by his frank declaration of his mind on all subjects to do their part as well. This was one great secret of his success in influencing others. They felt sure of knowing his mind, and free to speak theirs. This opened the way to confidence on all points; all felt at ease with him; a feeling which the most devoted kindness alone will not impart.

After dinner there were speeches. The London merchant's was delivered with a thrilling effect; he spoke with a living power, touched with exquisite skill each link of feeling,—the marriage-bond of that day,—the ties of filial and parental affection,—the union between the Squire and his tenantry; and, lastly, the true brotherhood of man. All listened in deepest interest, which was expressed by Mr. Clifford when he rose in thanks for that speech, but the tear that filled many an eye was the most eloquent response. William made a short, simple, and

beautiful reply to all the kind wishes expressed for his wife and himself. And now, as all seemed concluding, Ted whispered to Alfred, who had chosen to sit by the swift-handed rower,—

‘Your turn is come now, sir; you must make a speech.’

‘Must I?’ said Alfred.

‘Yes, of course,’ replied Ted. ‘Go, and ask your papa.’

So Alfred slipped down from his chair, and going to his papa, said,—

‘Papa, must I speech?’

There was a cry of ‘Yes, yes!’ And Mr. Clifford, greatly amused, lifted Alfred up to stand on his knee.

‘What must I say, papa?’

‘I cannot tell you. What have you to say about Mercy?’

Alfred looked at Mercy, considering; then very deliberately said,—

‘Mercy is good; Mercy is kind; Mercy is so clever, she mends our broken toys!’

There was a general applause at this climax, amidst which Alfred descended. But now little Maud shouted from her high-backed chair by Olivia’s side, ‘May, too?’ being desirous of nothing more than the promotion to her father’s knee.

‘Ladies don’t make speeches, Maud,’ said her father; but little Maud was determined to follow, and the assembly began to demand a hearing for her. So Maud stood on her father’s knee, looking round in great glee.

‘Now, Maud, for your speech. See, there is Mercy. What have you to say?’

Little Maud looked, and seeing Mercy, stretched out her little arms, shouting, 'Mer! Mer! — May! May!' This speech, blending the two names, and adding nothing more, was considered perfection; and as little Maud's arms were still stretched out to Mercy, she was allowed to make her own way over the table. Many hands were extended to guard and guide the fair baby, as she stepped on amidst fruit and flowers in her little blue shoes, until received by Mercy she sat content on her knee.

After the repast, the house was opened as well as the park and gardens, and many beautiful things were seen and admired. Tea and coffee were provided early. William had Black Beauty held at the gate, and prepared to take leave. When the children found Mercy was departing, little Constance, who had had the weight on her spirit all day, clung to her, sobbing. Alfred put on a brave face, and said, though with a very choking voice,—


'I do not cry! I shall go and see Mercy in her new home very often.' And he walked off like a hero unwilling to risk a defeat. Little Maud had been discreetly carried out of the way.

Poor Mercy! But Lady Gertrude stood by; and who would not do their best at self-command in her presence? At length she was safely in the farm-gig, the reins in her husband's hands, and then soon out of sight. The villagers, seeing them depart, raised a shout,—for was not William to them as a friend and a brother? The evening bells rang out their sweet chimes again, and the gathered company, with pleased and grateful feeling at a holiday so bright and so happy, dispersed.

CHAPTER XXI.

MR. MERRIDEW, the London merchant, consented to spend another day at the farm, on the promise that they should all, as an unbroken party, pass the next evening Broadmeads with William and Mercy.

The party had only just risen from breakfast the next morning when Molly came in, saying, 'Master William's at the gate!' They hastened out one after another. William was standing beside Nora, who stood impatient and proud in a new London gig, and London harness to match. 'Come, father! come mother!' said William's cheerful voice. 'I want you all to come and see what Joe has done for Nora and me!' There was soon a surrounding of the gig and the horse, a complete inspection, and the highest approval; and Joe stood by enjoying his brother's surprise. 'It was last evening,' said William, 'when I called our man to put up the gig he said, "I don't know that I can, master; there be another there already." "Another?" I asked; "is any one here?" "No, master," he said; "but Josh came up this morning, and a new gig came along up the lanes here to meet him, and there's harness packed up in a box: Would you please to see the gig? I will soon have him out; it is the handsomest gig I ever did see, or any one else here about in these parts!" So I fetched Mercy and we soon drew out the gig, and I read the



card upon it. "The wedding-gift of a brother. — J. S." You know, father, we were thinking how best to manage with one ; but see, now I am to travel the road like a gentleman !


'One of Nature's own gentlemen you are,' said Mr. Merridew, aside ; 'and the refinement true religion gives is the highest, I believe.'

'Let me have the first ride,' said the sailor to his brother, impatient to be seated and off.

So William started with Ted, after a hearty shake of his brother's hand as he stepped into his new gig, and the gig and harness and Nora, with William and Ted, drove off to Broadmeads ; William looking back to shout, 'Do be up with us early—as soon as you have dined.'

It delighted Mercy, with William to help and Sukey to explain where all things could be found, to make preparations for this evening party. They all came up early. Father, mother, and Rose, Mr. Merridew, the Derbyshire uncle, aunt, and cousin, Joe, Samson, and Ted. The new tea-service, the gift of all the old servants at the Hall, was set out on the table, and Mercy did her best to produce the nearest resemblance she could to Mrs. Smith's hospitable table, so familiar to her. There was an inspection of the farm and all its live stock before tea ; and after tea, pleasant converse so beguiling the time, that the sun was hastening to leave them before they rose to depart. Before leaving Mr. Merridew called William and his father apart, saying, 'I have a little business with you. I must tell you that it has been one of my comforts in life to provide a small dowry for portionless maidens, when the only thing wanted was money. I have no reason to suppose that the

addition of money is of any great importance, Mr. Smith, to your son, but you have done wisely as a father in freely consenting to a marriage of affection full of promise as this is, and though not a farmer myself, I know a little capital at starting may well be increased with advantage. So I must be allowed, as one of your son's oldest friends, to stand as guardian to his bride, and lay down this small cheque for her portion. My guardianship will not be a long one, my good friends; we shall never meet again: this charming visit will be my last upon earth. I do not know why, but I feel my time near, and the gate of Life brightens before me as I draw near it, in humble hope, that when my Saviour had overcome the sharpness of death, He opened that gate for believers in Him. Do not notice this to Joe; he is a son to me, and I would not depress him until the time be come. You need not tell Mercy until I have left. No thanks are due to me, the pleasure is most my own; I wish none written after me, only reckon me your friend, and the thought that you are happy will shed its brightness on me.' The note placed in William's hand contained a cheque for three hundred pounds. Mr. Smith had stayed with his son when the rest of the party walked home. Mercy shed tears when they told her, not that she could then tell how great the comfort of the money was at this time, but she felt the kindness, and grieved at the thought of soon losing such a friend. The fact that the money was reckoned hers Mercy took no account of; her husband was hers, and she thought not of herself, nor of anything else but as his. To William the comfort was inexpressibly great; he had worked for his parents and brothers, and could not lay up much in store




for himself, and he knew how the least fear of a debt would weigh down the spirit of his father: but this lifted his head above danger of that; he saw the relief in his father's brightening face, and prepared with fresh energy for the labours of life.

Early the next morning Mr. Merridew, Joe, and Samson started for London. William came over with Nora in the new gig to drive his friend and benefactor, Mr. Merridew, to meet the stage-coach; and that drive, the last time he ever saw his friend, became as memorable to him as his first, beside him on the stage-coach, when he was a lad in London in his Uncle Samson's shop. How great, how unutterable, the amount of blessing that may follow from not walking the earth in a solitary, exclusive abstraction, but realising that each human being is a brother; then slight occasions may open a door, through which both personal and relative happiness may endlessly follow.

Mr. Benson, the Derbyshire uncle, remained a few days longer. Both Mr. and Mrs. Smith greatly enjoyed the lengthened visit these relatives made. Mr. Smith felt the elevating influence of one who realised, and proved, that his heart and treasure were above; yet one whose opinion all must respect in the business questions of the life that now is,—one who lived above the world he laboured in, making it his daily effort to follow the precepts of the Divine Word as his law, and then casting all corroding care upon his God. His judgment being much thought of by others, he was frequently appealed to for an opinion in questions of business. These appeals, when they concerned dealing with others, he would often answer by

saying, with a smile, ‘“ Do to others as you would that others should do to you ;” I have striven hard to walk by that rule, and it has been a golden rule to me.’

Mr. Smith felt surprised that one who farmed six hundred acres, with only a small funded capital and nine sons and daughters, should have a mind at leisure for the wide-spread interests of missions ; should be rejoicing in Chinamen, Red Indians, and slaves, turning from idols to serve the true God ! Mr. Smith in conversation fell back on his one familiar subject, the average of crops, the causes of failure in produce, or the estimate of seasons ; but the Derbyshire farmer seemed to dismiss his farm from his remembrance, and ‘ would lead you,’ as Mr. Smith said, ‘ in the length of an evening, all over the earth !’ At first Mr. Smith seemed quite at a loss, and not a little tired out by this demand upon him, when he had walked over his fields till set of sun, and considered his day’s work all done, then to be stepping from Europe to North America, where Red Indians were beginning to gather together to listen to the words of the Book ; then, before ever you knew of the intention, to be landed in Asia, to make acquaintance with some of bright promise there ; and, when you had settled your own mind for a quiet doze by the fire, to find you must land on the burning sands of Africa, and spend all that remained of the evening in hopes of eternal freedom for the negro’s dark race, and the sympathy of veneration and love for martyr missionaries whose term of life and labour then only averaged two years ! Yet, at the conclusion, Mr. Benson looked as bright as if a quenchless sunbeam had made a home in his eyes ; and really, to tell the truth, Mr. Smith was not sure that he did not on the whole feel more



lively than when this most unexpected tour round the whole world began.

Sometimes Mr. Benson would speak of his home—the useful life that his elder children, he trusted, led there; the poor of the village, and his own farming lads; the workhouse, too, for he was in office; and the blessing that would rest on the efforts of only one, if the work, let it be what it might, were but done looking up for a better wisdom and strength than our own. Farmer Smith began to ponder on what the difference could be between himself and his brother-in-law, seeing the same hope dwelt within them. And while he thought on these things, with a wish to know the truth, light broke in on his mind, as it always will when we so think, and he began to see that he had thought of religion for himself, as a hope to live and die by; not as a blessing, whose all-constraining love was to lead us to desire to draw all men within it. He had lighted his own candle, and by it he himself walked through darkness; but he had not looked around to see who might be stumbling without the guiding ray, nor thought of kindling other lights by that which blessed his own path. He said to himself many times, ‘But what can I do?’ The first expansion comes not naturally to one long narrowed to think only of personal religion. Then he remembered the descriptions his brother-in-law had given of the poor dying heathen, and Christian slaves, twice emancipated, from the chains of earth and those invisible, and to man alone invincible, fetters, whose bonds are eternal. Mr. Smith had heard a sermon preached once a year, when a stranger stood up in their pulpit, under the disadvantage of asking for money: he had wished their

own minister would have told them what they should do in his own familiar way, but it was plain money was wanted, so he gave half-a crown, which he always had ready when he heard that one of those particular gentlemen was coming. But his brother's descriptions of this man, or that aged woman, or this little child, and the hope that dawned on them—the tear that would glisten in his brother's speaking eye—all this came home to Mr. Smith, and he thought the best beginning was to take out a five-pound note and give it straightway to his brother. Then Mrs. Smith gave one of those rare smiles of hers, that only blessed great occasions, but that were in themselves worth a five-pound note to those who felt the glow that smile could impart.

Then, too, Mrs. Smith gathered assurance; she never wanted courage, but she gathered assurance and went to her cupboard, and brought out from the back corner a tea-cup; it had stood there for years—stood there ever since that sad yet blessed illness of hers; when Rose, on her return, had told her mother tales of the heathen, and how we could send heavenly instruction to them. From time to time Mrs. Smith had dropped her willing offering in; but on her brother's former visit she had said nothing to him, and ever since then she had not known what to do with it: she did not seem to have considered it would be at all the right thing to give it to any stranger who might come to take away what money he could gather; so the cup had still held its increasing store, for Mrs. Smith's interest once awakened never slumbered again. Silver had been changed into gold; this Mrs. Smith knew, for she had done it herself;

but she had not the least idea what was in it: this was no concern, she thought, of hers; she had given what and when she felt that she could, the heap lay in that cup, and that was enough.

It was true that small periodicals came to the farm, in a print far from inviting to those unused to reading; they were laid up with the newspapers when Mr. Smith had read the report in the weekly journal of the sale of corn in Mark Lane, and there they might still be found: for, with many a true heart, paper and ink will not and cannot form the one needed link between its sympathies and the vast heathen race. But the Derbyshire farmer was alive on the subject: hard-working man as he was, and had brought up his children to be, what land could be named from the east to the west which he had not watered with prayer, or his hand not enriched with a gift? He had a personal interest in all; they lived in his remembrance like brethren afar off in need; therefore no wonder his words fell with power. And Mrs. Smith brought out her cup from the closet, and poured into his hands the uncounted contents. That cup did not return to the tea-tray again, but went back to its corner in Mrs. Smith's cupboard.

It is written, 'God loveth the cheerful giver.' Who is there that does not prize a love infinite, eternal? Who, then, that will not learn the sweet secret of giving? It is also the secret of increase. We are all quite certain that the poor widow who cast all her living into the treasury of God was not left to faint with hunger, nor to languish in want: no ravens came to feed her, no cruse that gave out its store, yet wasted not in giving; but the

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heart of her God kept hers beating freely in life, and the Hand that feeds a world supplied all her need. Mr. Smith soon found that the word of promise is sure, and the soul that watereth others shall be watered itself. When care for the eternal welfare of others, at home and abroad, began to find a place in his thoughts, cares for this life had to find a lower place, no longer filling his thoughts and pressing him hard. And experience will teach us, that wherever an active care for the heathen springs up in the heart, that heart grows richer in the grace and blessing of God, and sheds a more influential light around it, wherever its dwelling may be.

Rose told Mercy the story of the cup, and Mercy, with William's glad consent, set up one for herself; for she too had a cupboard, and she set a cup in the corner. And Ted listening one day said, in his blunt way, 'I ought to give all that goes out from this house; for don't I know the badness where no Bible is found? so, if giving be the way to mend that, just hand out my bag, mother.' Mrs. Smith brought out the bag. Ted thrust in his hand, and brought it out filled, he knew not with what. 'There, uncle, take that; I never yet counted money, and I won't begin when I want to mend such a bad job as this.'

'No, no, Ted,' said his uncle; 'no desperate giving!'

But Ted was out of hearing, and his mother said, 'Take it; none know how soon the sea may roll over his head. I often think so at night when a stormy wind blows; and if I live to see it, it would ease me to see he had given of his earnings so freely to God!'

'Heaven preserve the dear sailor-boy!' said the uncle,

with fervour ; 'but I really seem to come here to reap a ripe harvest, only waiting to be gathered. I shall hardly content myself, I fear, many years in absence again !' 'I hope not,' said the Derbyshire aunt ; and kind words flowed in response ; and so, with every blessing brightening, William's wedding-party broke up.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE few days that Mrs. Cox thought it right to wait before the first visit to Mercy in her farm, appeared very long to Constance and Alfred. On the Saturday of that same week Mrs. Cox could not any longer resist their importunity, but said, 'After dinner we will go.' Sally Millington begged leave to carry little Maud, but Mrs. Cox said, 'You have not good manners enough as yet, Sally, for me to take you to-day. If you wish me to trust you on all occasions you must learn a more respectful behaviour, and get rid of your free-and-easy way.' So Sally Millington might not go. In the afternoon, when little Maud was laid down to sleep, which was soon after dinner, Constance and Alfred in great delight started with Mrs. Cox.

The day was one of those we often have when spring is mantling winter's barren form in vernal beauty ; brooding in warmth of richest sunshine over the opening life of nature. The walk itself was most beguiling to the children : through lanes where mossy banks were flower-bestrewn, with such a clustering wealth of fair and fragrant blossoms that little feet would linger there ; then through the meadows, where the cowslips hung their drooping heads in countless bells of sweet perfume. These past, the wood came

next, and here the children knelt on the old roots of forest trees where violets bloomed, those darlings of the spring. The little baskets were brimfull of all the flowers the green earth nurtures in her breast, blossoming there as if to tempt childhood to take its fill of spring-tide flowers and spring-tide joy. Betty Cox looked on her charge in patient pleasure; she loved to see them amongst the wild flowers, as glad in that sweet sunshine as butterfly or bee. 'Hush! hark!' said Constance; and there, a little way apart upon a hawthorn, a nightingale poured forth its song. Their nurse sat down upon a fallen tree, and the children with their flowers at her feet.

While seated there an aged man came slowly tottering by, a tall old man, feeble with many years. With his right hand he leaned upon a stick, and with his left he held a bundle of sere wood upon his shoulder. Seeing the children and their nurse, the old man said, as he passed by, 'Nicely pleasant to-day!' The children looked at him, forgetting birds and flowers in sight of that old man. A few steps further and the rotten cord that bound the sticks gave way, and they fell strewn behind him. The old man turned a look back on his fallen fagot, of helpless dismay, so patient yet so sad, it went to Betty Cox's heart. But in a moment little Alfred was at the old man's side, saying, 'Don't mind about your sticks, I will pick them all up — every one!' 'Bless your dear heart and hand!' the old man said. 'My back do ache that bad already, I could scarce hobble home; but the firing be all spent and my old woman craved a cup of tea.' Constance had now made her way, and helped to lay together the fallen sticks.

'Do you live far from here?' asked Mrs. Cox.

‘Not for young feet to travel, but far for mine. Maybe that you can see the thatch, for the young leaf scarce rigs the trees, down in the dingle yonder?’

‘Is your wife as feeble as you are?’

‘Poor creature! she is bed-ridden these two years. Have you never heard speak of Dolly of the Dell?’

‘No,’ said Mrs. Cox. ‘Have you lived long there?’

‘Aye, the length of a long life. I was born and bred there, and brought my wife home there afore she had seen twenty; and a thrifty soul she was as ever trod upon shoe leather, and wonderful nimble! yet she has wholly failed afore me, and laid bed-ridden now two years!’

‘And have you no children to help your old age?’

‘Aye, yes; there be children, and plenty of them: ten hungry mouths I have fed on a labourer’s pay, and no charities ever cross this parish bound; they be pent in on the other side, as if they flowed within banks like a river: and yet not wholly so, for that might overflow some chance time with rain, but there’s never been a stray drop come watering me.’

‘Don’t your children try to help you?’

‘Poor rogues! as for them, why there’s little ones to feed, and who be there that wouldn’t think of the young mouths afore they thought of the old? Three lads be ’listed, and the others be all mostly settled away.’

‘Can you read?’ asked Mrs. Cox.

‘No, I ben’t no scholar—nor be Dolly neither. Why, seventy years ago there was no schooling given in lonesome places like this! and I be turned eighty, and Dolly just under.’

‘Does not your minister call?’

‘No; that be not his way: he likes to see folks at church, and we could not get there for many a day.’

‘You should send to let him know that you are set fast at home, and then I dare say he would come.’

‘I don’t know,’ said the old man; ‘’tis likely he might; they say, if you send, he will call in and drop you a shilling: but I don’t know. I am sure that ain’t comfort that lasts, and, one way or another, we never did beg.’

The old man stood leaning his weary back against a tree, now watching the children, who had finished their heap, and now the wood, as if he scarce knew what to do.

‘Look!’ said Alfred, when a break in the conversation allowed. ‘This old string is good for nothing: I can break it like that.’

‘I don’t know, I be sure,’ said the old man, whose spirit seemed broken too; ‘’tis a bad job, I fear. I will just huddle up a few in my arm and get home if I can. Could you have the kindness to hand them up, pretty dear?’

‘Cox,’ said little Alfred, ‘I can carry those sticks on my shoulder, you know, just like the old man; do tie them up, will you, Cox? it is only down there!’

Betty Cox never checked or chilled a child’s rising sympathy, she would have made any sacrifice rather than deny compassion’s warm impulse; her own soul, too, was filled with sadness for these old people, left in life’s helpless decay to languish unknown. ‘How can we tie them up?’ she said to the child; then, taking out her large pocket-handkerchief, she tried to put a bundle inside, but it held

too few. 'Shall we each carry some in our arms?' asked Betty Cox.

'No, Cox, that will not do: we could only carry so few. I want them up on my shoulder, and not let the poor old man carry any!'

Cox looked round in inquiry as to what could be done, when the blue sash of little Constance waved in the breeze, as if saying, 'Here am I, take me!' It was a sash of narrower ribbon than the wide blue worn now. Betty Cox said, 'Shall we bind up the old man's sticks with your sash?' This Constance thought the best of all things, and Alfred was charmed with the success of his plan to carry the wood. So the sere little branches wore a band of bright blue, and they were laid on Alfred's young shoulder, by his sunny ringlets of hair, and the blue ribbon that bound them streamed over his brodered vest of nankeen. He stepped on beside the old man, and one might almost fancy him saying, 'My father, here is the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' 'The true son of his father!' said Betty Cox, in her heart, for she had heard from the house-keeper the tale of Old Willy. Constance tripped along lightly beside the little woodman, only stopping at every dry stick, which she picked up and gave to her nurse to carry, whose armful grew heavy.

'Take care how you walk!' said Betty Cox to little Alfred; but the caution was in vain, almost as she spoke he caught his foot in a stump and fell down with his load.

'All right!' he said, as soon as he was up again and saw the bundle not broken. But Betty Cox saw blood starting. 'You have cut yourself, child; let me see!' she exclaimed.

‘That’s nothing,’ said Alfred, smearing his little hand.

It was a slight cut on his chin. Betty Cox dipped her handkerchief in the stream that ran through the wood and stopped the bleeding. ‘Better wounded doing good to your neighbour,’ said Betty Cox, ‘than with swords on the battle-field.’

‘I don’t know,’ said Alfred; ‘knights are brave men and wear golden spurs, and take care of good women; and perhaps I shall be one!’

‘No, Alfred,’ said Constance; ‘you know papa says you must live at home and take care of mamma, as he does of grandmamma.’

‘I can fight all the battles,’ said Alfred, ‘and then come home and live.’ And Betty Cox gave a sigh, for she thought how many a fair young head lay far away from kindred and home in a soldier’s rude grave. But now they were started again, the old man greatly comforted to find himself still attended so well. Arrived at the cottage he went in first, and a feeble voice said, ‘Oh, Nat, what a wearyful time ye have been! and never a stick with ye now, and I faint for my tea!’

‘They be coming,’ said Nat, sitting down on a chair, quite spent with the effort of keeping pace with the child.

‘Here it is,’ said little Alfred, going in with his faggot and standing beside the old woman’s bed.

‘Nat! Nat!’ said the old woman, ‘where did ye find him? be he a babe of the wood? And the old rope dyed blue! Heaven bless you, my darling! But look, there be blood!’

‘That’s nothing,’ said Alfred; ‘and this is for your tea.’

‘Come Nat,’ said poor old Dolly, ‘ye has wiped your forehead enow, and I be in visions and dreams for want of my tea.’

Betty Cox had held back to let the boy make his way; but she came in at this, and little Constance with her, and soon persuaded the old woman that it was no dream. She lighted herself the little fire in the grate, to the delight of Constance and Alfred, who had never seen Mrs. Cox light a fire. Then they put on water, and soon made it boil, and left poor old Dolly happy with her tea.

Absorbed by pity and interest for the old man, and the active joy of rendering help, they had almost forgotten the eager start for the farm. But now they set out with fresh glee; no more delays came, and they soon were with Mercy, lost in the gladness of that greeting. They told the tale of the poor old man to Mercy and William, and they promised to see to them, and their seeing after any was a sure promise of blessing. Who could better know than Mercy, trained in it as a child, how to help and comfort the old? And William had never seen a fellow-creature in need without stretching out a ready hand to relieve. When they had poured out their tale of sympathy they turned from all care to delight in the farm. They were eager to see all things, from the greatest to the least; but the details of that evening can well be imagined, and we must only take them safely home, where all things were related, and leave them there with each little head on its pillow.

Six weeks had not passed away since Mr. Merridew’s visit to the farm, when a letter came from Joe with the signs of mourning upon it. ‘Where is Rose?’ asked her

father, who did not seem to have quite the courage to open it himself. At this moment William stepped in, as he often did of a morning. His father held out the letter. 'O dear, O dear!' said William; 'we know the grief folded there. Here, Rose, you must read this; I fear it's more than I could.' They all waited around, and Rose opened and read:—

'DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER,—I have unexpected tidings to tell—unexpected to me, though it seems they were not to him, my best friend, and, as I may truly say, our best friend, Mr. Merridew. You all know how cheery he was at Will's wedding, and so he kept on up to this time; he never had a day's illness, but I noted how he seemed putting all things in order, and he would say to me, "This thing will be found here," or "Those business papers are there." It always made me feel bad, but it came out so naturally, just as if he had a journey before him. One day—it was only last week—I did say to him, "Do you make count on any absence that you give me this in charge?" And he smiled and answered, "Yes, whence I shall not return any more to my desk. I leave that desk to you, Joe; and remember, my son, for such you have been to me, remember that you conduct business on the principles you have seen me work upon. I have had one Guide-Book, Joe, the Word that shall judge us in the last day. I have never desired to be a rich man, but I have had enough and to spare, for I may humbly say that blessing that maketh rich has rested upon me. And now, Joe," he said, "I have left my business to you; but I have not left you a rich man, only capital to move on, and

that capital I wish never taken out of the business, but left by you to whoever may follow when you give up your stewardship. Take my advice," he said, "Joe, don't die a rich man. You started poor, and, except the little capital I leave you, you will earn all you call your own. Don't hoard up your earnings. Remember, you are not like men who receive wealth which they are bound to leave, not wasted, but improved, to successors. You are a working man; think then of your brethren, countless working men: be like the fertilizing cloud, gathering up the moisture to pour it down on the parched and thirsty places around. I made this my object, and now that my working-day is over I have no more disquiet than a child looking out for its pillow. Not that I trust to any doings of mine, I am but an unprofitable servant, and if I looked to myself for a moment my record would be, 'I have done the things I ought not, and left undone the things that I ought to have done.' But I stand in my Saviour; His righteousness is perfect, and He has made atonement for me. You, I hope, will be both a husband and a father, but make no fortunes for your children, let them earn the bread of industry. There is nothing superfluous, the earnings that are hoarded are keeping some mouths hungry, some bodies unclad, and hastening untimely graves. Let it be written on the increase of each year, 'Freely ye have received, freely give.' I have never married, not because I never loved, but all that is over now. Life has been happy to me, and life eternal draws near."

'That evening I wrote down his words, lest I should forget; but he said no more, kept on as usual, and asked me to go down to his country-house for the Sunday. On

Sunday evening I felt anxious, I hardly knew why, but I ventured to ask if I might sleep in his room. He answered with that kind smile you must so well remember, that in perfect retirement he had long felt nearer heaven than earth, and his sleep would be less sweet if he thought anxious watchers were near. But when his faithful servant went in the next morning he lay undisturbed on his pillow, but the heavenly spirit had departed. I have wept for him like a child, and the house is full of weeping, and how many eyes will be dim when they hear he is gone! But, as I say, what a company there must have been on the shore of that better land waiting to receive him!

‘It has been a comfort to write to you, though I know it will leave you all sorrowing, yet not without hope.

‘You shall soon hear again from your

‘Affectionate and dutiful son,

‘JOSEPH SMITH.’

The family at both farms went into mourning and wept for their friend. Samson attended the funeral, and the next day wrote one of his brief and inexpressive notes home. In the course of the following week Joe wrote again:—

‘DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER,—I am in the house of business again, and my place is at this honoured desk, which I am not worthy to fill. I have been with Mr. Butterworth, the friend who was to him as a brother, as much as possible at the country-house, until all the last services of love to the mortal body were over. It was

hard work to hide from our eyes that fatherly smile that has lighted the pathway of life to so many! He was buried in the city church, where his departed relatives lay: mourners pressed in from all sides, I will not say to pay the last token of respect, for most surely he must live in remembrance through life, and countless occasions will arise in which his memory will be revered, and his wishes fulfilled. The country-house is left to Mr. Butterworth, whose family were like children to him: in truth, who shall reckon up the number who looked on him as a father, or as their best benefactor? Grief flows in from all sides, but it is no use writing of that.

· I will tell you one thing I know of him now, from Mr. Butterworth himself. When young, he gave his affections to one whom he supposed free to respond to them. He waited until he had worked up his way and had all ready to offer, and then learned from herself that she had long loved another, to whom she was not allowed to engage herself, as his means were not thought sufficient. Hearing this he retired, and directed his efforts to learn all he could of the man whom she loved; then, finding the want of money to be the only hindrance, he so managed things as, at the cost of a large sum of money, to get him placed in a position that left him free to offer his hand. Our friend had the generous pleasure and happiness of knowing he had secured the happiness of others, and from that time he lived to make this his object in life. There lingers behind him a pathway of light. Blessings unnumbered follow him to his grave, or rather go before him, we may say, to heaven.

‘ The country-house will be closed for six months; this

is Mr. Butterworth's arrangement, for, he says, he could not bring the cheerful life of his home there for a while; though I rather believe it would have been wished. He kindly says he shall always welcome me there as one who stood as a son in the affections of his friend, and a home in such a family stands second only to my own. There is much now to be done, and will be for me; but, dear father, I will run down, if I can, for a week, when autumn comes on; perhaps put the first sickle to the corn: so you must all cheer up, for, in one sense, we ought not to mourn. And a friend gone before us is not a friend lost, but only a fresh tie to a better world than this. • With my love to all,

‘ Your affectionate, dutiful son,

‘ JOSEPH SMITH.’

These letters were shown to Olivia, when calling to inquire the cause of mourning at the farm; and she was allowed to take them in charge for Mr. Clifford and Lady Gertrude to see. They recalled the interest his short visit had awakened, and it was felt as a privilege and pleasure to have received him that day.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THERE is a friend who must not be forgotten in renewed acquaintance with the 'Ministering Children.' The mother of the bookbinding boy still continued a bright example to many. Her box of mercies we told of before. The treasury in her home for God, sacred as His of old in the Temple, which was hallowed more in His sight by the poor woman's offering than by all that the rich cast in of their abundance, for He measures gifts by the faith and love that prompt them. Each year that box was still filled with the offerings of that thankful heart. Each blessing that surprised her she hastened to put in her thank-offering, glad at heart as any Israelite of old when he brought his gift to the altar. Her hope was not only what the faithful Israelite felt, for the dispensation of the Spirit calls on all to repent, and the Son of God has the heathen for His inheritance. When her glad hand dropped in her offering, she looked with the mind's vivid eye far over continents and wide-spreading seas to the lands where idolaters once paid their cruel worship to idols of wood and of stone, and saw them bending the knee in prayer to the true God. She saw the little children who would have been slain by mothers without natural affection; she saw them cared for with all tenderness by those very same mothers, who had learned to know and believe

the love God had to them; saw these rescued little children trooping to school, singing their anthems of praise, and almost heard the glad hallelujah that rose up to heaven. She saw their parents look upon them with inexpressible thankfulness, delivered from the guilt of shedding the blood of their offspring, and treading with them the pathway to heaven. Then another glance showed her the heathen's deathbed — the heathen that was, but now the child of God by faith in Christ Jesus. The poor aged mother, who would have been left to perish in some jungle a prey to the wild beasts, or taken down to die in the cold river's brink, now lying in blessed hope on her mat on the floor, with heaven lighting up her dying eye and kindling her voice, breathing out the blessed words of Him who came to save the lost; and, when sinking in the body's death, rising victorious in spirit, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

All this, and much more, filled the glad vision of the mother of the bookbinding boy, and, therefore, no wonder the love of Christ still constrained her to make an offering continually in so blessed a cause. And may it not be a question whether, as the poor men of Galilee were the Apostles of the Lord and messengers of the churches, so now the steady offerings of those comparatively poor in this world may not be found the chief instrument in sending evangelists to the heathen world? It is not the torrent that precipitates its waters at one leap to the gulf below which mainly feeds the mighty river that flows on to the sea; but the countless rills that rise unobserved in the bosom of the hills, and wind their way with low warblings of praise, unheard in this busy world except by close,

listening ears, but whose music ascends to the throne of the Eternal, where the din of earth never reaches.

We might tell of others who cheer life's hardest toil, and poverty's sharp yoke, by such ceaseless ministries of love; but we are only allowed to tell of this one noble-hearted woman (noble in the estimate Evangelists have taught us), because she was the mother to that ministering child, the bookbinding boy.

One Sunday afternoon this poor woman was coming home from church, when she met in the streets a person of sorrowful aspect, who asked her the time. 'I can only tell you,' she replied, 'by the church service now over; by that we know the hour must be near five o'clock.'

'Thank you,' said the stranger. 'I have been to see my daughter, and am making my way home.'

'Have you been to church to-day?' the poor woman asked.

'No, I have no time for church; other things engage me.'

'Then go this evening with us,' said the poor woman. 'I am now going home; come and take a cup of tea with us, and then we can all go together.'

The stranger was unwilling at first, but yielded at length. They were long summer days; the thought of tea was refreshing, and the kind hospitality, no doubt, had its weight. So she went in to tea, and then they all went to church. After service they parted at the church-door, and neither knew the name of the other.

Not many weeks after this, when the mother of the bookbinding boy was in the church, the clergyman said,

from the pulpit, that he had a letter he wished to read ; it was to this effect :—

‘ REV. SIR,— Not long ago I was persuaded by a poor woman whom I met in the street to go home with her to tea, and then attend the evening service with her. I was unwilling at first, for I was not in the habit of attending public worship, but I did go at last, persuaded by her ; and that service, I trust, has turned my heart to Christ. I don’t know the name of the poor woman, nor the name of the street where she lived ; I only remember the name of the church : so I send this to you, as I am now too far away to make any inquiry. If you will kindly make known the blessing that followed her desire to do good, if she should be in church she will be thankful to hear it.

‘ I remain, Rev. Sir,

‘ Yours respectfully,

‘ L. M.’

The evening of life was now gathering fast around both the parents of the bookbinding-boy, shedding dimness of vision, stealing strength from her active limbs, and weakening still more her husband’s feebler power. One day a knock was heard at the door, and the good wife and mother opened to see who was there. This time there was no large cart, like that which bore the mangle long years before ; no stranger bearing an order in loving disguise from her son, but a small party of gentlemen. The poor woman curtsied, and waited their will. To her surprise they walked in ; one had a book in his hand.

They asked her many questions as to age, family, and circumstances, length of residence also, and other such questions as these. Then they spoke in an under-tone one to another. This was very mysterious, but it did not alarm the clear conscience and brave heart of the mother of the bookbinding boy. At length they said to her,—

‘We are able to make an offer to you and your husband, that we hope may be acceptable—an Almshouse for life, with a small weekly income, and additional comforts belonging thereto.’

This could scarcely be believed. But then, in that poor woman’s generous heart there arose the feeling for others, and she said,—

‘Pardon me, gentlemen, for making so bold to say anything against such a blessing, but should we not be keeping some other poor creatures out who might stand more in need of it even than we, as I can still work for our bread?’

‘No,’ they answered, ‘you need not fear; we have made every inquiry before coming to you, and you are the only persons who can be presented as meeting the conditions required.’

So their cup ran over in blessing; and they went to their little home, and with them went the Family Bible; and the box of mercies, itself overflowing; and Ephraim the youngest son was allowed to go with them, as he was considered by his mother not yet to have outgrown her care; and the room in the little street that had so long been their home became the abode of the bookbinding son and his family. And so we take our leave of them in a snug little almshouse, with no hard work to do, but time

to read and enjoy the peaceful evening of life in thankfulness to God and to man.

Happy days from the adventure of the faggot in the wood rose on old Nathaniel and Dolly. It was to Mercy's delight that they were given her in charge: her own cup of blessing was brimful and running over, with William for her husband, his parents as her parents, Rose as her sister, and a cheerful farm for her home. She was happy to find some on whom to pour out the overflowing happiness of her satisfied heart. Then, too, the sweet work of charity had been hers when a child, sent by her dear grandmother to wait on the aged and feeble. It would come back again in the blessing of remembrance. William rejoiced to see her so ready for real earnest work, as he found on looking in on the woodman that the care of them would be. Mercy was no way daunted by the report that he gave, but held a talk with Sukey on what her master had said. And Sukey made answer,—‘If there be boards to scrub, or bricks that want cleaning, or such-like work, I will show you in no time what I can do!’ So, still further encouraged, Mercy went off to the wood.

Poor old Dolly was alone, lying helpless in bed, and greatly pleased and surprised to see a comely-looking woman come in and sit down by her side, asking her how she did. Old Dolly greatly hungered for news; she had no happier thoughts to fill the void in her heart now life's work was all over and the children all turned off: poor old Dolly thought there was nothing left to care about in the world, only news. When old Nathaniel came home of a day she would say, ‘What be the news?’ and he would reply, ‘How can I tell? there's none comes telling me.’

And old Dolly would say, 'If I could be stirring, wouldn't I pick it up! but as for you, why, you have no more know than the bricks!' So when Mercy went in and sat down by the bed, old Dolly said, 'I am so glad of a friend to step in for a chat; there is scarce a body now will tell old Dolly the news. I dare say you saw the bride that was married up at the next parish church, and such fine doings they say in the Squire's great park; and they do say,' said Dolly, lowering her voice—'you know I wasn't there—but they do say she looked heavenly, dressed so lovely and meek; and three little creatures, like cherubs, round about her. They say she is coming to live alongside of me—up in Broadmeads Farm, they do say; but I don't know how that may be.' It was plain that poor old Dolly was quite as eager to tell as she could be to hear all the news of the day; but now again she questioned: 'Tell me, did ye see the grand doings up there? They say she was married into Farmer Smith's family, but I didn't rightly hear who: but they say that the bridegroom looked as great as a prince when he saw her come up the church all set out like that! But did ye see her, I say?'

'I am Mrs. William Smith,' Mercy answered, yet blushing the while at all the old woman had said.

'Then in course ye did see, if ye be of the family. Now just tell me all, 'twill be something to think on.'

Mercy said, not without some glowing confusion, 'I was the bride.' Poor old Dolly shot upright in perfect surprise; then, looking at Mercy, she said,—

'That I should see the bride! and she come herself! It be most like a dream! Give me a shake of the hand, my

dear, will ye? That's real! Well, I don't mind the tales that they do tell about fairy folk; but if I did, I should say it was them came in here the end o' last week, and left that bit o' blue ribbon that's hanging up there, to bring me such luck as the sight of the bride. Well, dear, I take it the biggest favour ever showed me, that you should lighten my door with the step of a bride.'

Mercy soon discovered that there was everything to be done, but, with Sukey to help, a reformation was made. The house was cleaned throughout, and with the real work done by her mistress, Sukey thought nothing of her own willing labour. A few hours each day accomplished all by degrees. The bed-tick was washed and stuffed with fresh straw, making as wholesome and comfortable a bed as any cottage home could desire, especially if renewed once a-year, which is easily done in the country. The bed-clothes were old, indeed; but pure water and air made them fresh. Mercy made two short bed-gowns and two pretty old woman's caps, and the whole was complete. Nor did she then cease her care, but kept a watch over all, and with Sukey to help, things never lost comfort again. And the old man twisted a mat of straw, that he might not soil Sukey's clean floor. The old people, used in better days to be cleanly and neat, were delighted to see the fresh face things put on. Old Dolly pleased Sukey by saying,—

'There be no music like the scrub-brush to me in a strong, willing hand. And mind ye, young woman, ye will never want for a friend, putting out your strength as ye do for an old body like me.'

The old man said,—'When I cast my eyes round on the old place, it sets me back half a century,—aye, more ;

when first I brought Dolly home, before the children did crowd, when all things did wear the shine of her hand.' While whatever was requested, proposed; or done by Mercy's arrangement, Dolly always said, 'It can be nothing but right, for the bride ordered it so.'

Constance had persuaded the old woman to keep the blue sash, saying, 'You have so few pretty things, I want you to keep that.' So old Dorothy had her husband hang it up on a nail opposite the foot of her bed, beside the old weather-gauge, which was a long bit of sea-weed, now as dry as a straw, that a daughter brought her who once went to the sea. It was not very long before Mrs. Cox took Constance and Alfred to the woodman's cottage again. The change was both felt and seen; a look of cleanly comfort gave a cheer to all within. Poor old Dorothy poured out her thankful heart in expression. And when at last Betty Cox said, in her grave, pleasant way, 'We must give our thanks to God: it is He who giveth us friends;' old Dorothy stretched out her small thin arm towards the foot of her bed. 'Look ye there,' she said, pointing to the blue ribbon hanging beside the old, brown, smoke-dried sea-weed, 'I know nought about weather now; my day for fine skies is gone; but the bit o' fine ribbon, my old eyes can see that! The sun catches a hold of it when he creeps in at the pane of the clean lattice there. How pleased he is, to be sure, with that rare bit o' blue! he'll lie dazzling upon it before he creeps elsewhere. I look and see it glisten, and it minds me of all that's befell, until my poor, weary old heart, do climb up above by that rare bit o' blue in thanks and praise unto Him who ordered it so.'

Mrs. Cox's religious mind was not satisfied with the

charity that befriended only the body; she soon proposed to Constance and Alfred to give their aged friends a Bible. 'They could not read it,' said Constance. 'Cannot you read it to them? I am sure they would listen.' Constance thought she could. So Constance and Alfred saved their money for a Bible, one of good print, for the cottage in the dell. And little Constance read to the old people; they loved the sound of her voice: this was all they thought of at first, but our Lord has said, 'Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God;' and it was not long before they both felt the power of the enlightening word. They longed for their little reader, and when she did come old Dorothy thought not of news, but was all for the Book. Her body was feebler than her aged husband's, but her mind was more ready, more alive to take in the bearing of all that was read. Betty Cox often took little Constance alone, when Alfred was out riding with his father, and the child read with increasing interest while the old people listened.

One day Betty Cox found for Constance, Jacob's dream of the ladder, and said, 'You can read that.' When Constance had read it, old Dorothy said, 'That's pretty, very pretty reading, I am sure. But why didn't he go up when he had the main chance?' Constance did not understand, and the old woman repeated, 'I say, my dear, why did he not get a foot on the ladder, and just climb up safe into heaven? Dear me! I would, instead of hobbling here!'

Constance looked at her nurse, but Betty Cox left her to answer. Old Nat thought it hard that the child should be questioned so close, and said,—

‘There, hold your tongue, Dolly; and just think for yourself. How should the pretty dear know for why such things were that happened scores of years afore she was born?’

But Constance took courage, and said, ‘I don’t think Jacob could climb up that ladder, because it was only for angels.’

‘Very like,’ said Dolly; ‘yet I would have had a try: maybe they would just have lent him a hand to help him up there, for, you see, they must know ’tis the fitting thing to try when we do see a way.’

‘I know the way quite well,’ said little Constance.

‘Aye, belike you do, dear. I’ll answer for it, the angels some day will just have you up in their arms, and be off right away.’

‘No,’ said Constance, ‘not so; I know there is only one way, that is our Saviour Jesus Christ. I have learned the text where he says, “I am the Way;” and “Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out.” Those two texts are put together in my little red book.’

‘Be they, dear? But could it be He would take old lost ones like we?’

‘Mamma says God loves you,’ answered Constance, ‘and sent us and Mercy to take care of you.’

‘Does she, dear? Does the Book tell her so?’

‘Yes,’ answered Betty Cox; ‘it is written in the Book, “The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost.”’

Old Dorothy mused. ‘There, dear,’ she said, seeing Constance getting ready to go, ‘lay the Book up under by the bit o’ blue on the drawers there, where I can rest my

.

eyes on it till you come again ; it will mind me of comfort, for they be heavenly words !'

And so, by degrees, little Constance grew at home with the Bible and the old people. And the child and the Bible became to them like the first streak of the dawn, the sure promise of day. They listened and loved, they loved and believed, they believed and obeyed. Is it not for this that the aged poor are often retained in a lingering existence of feebleness and want, instead of ending life when vigour ends, that the quiet of life's evening may bring to their ears the record that God hath given us of eternal salvation through the knowledge of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ? Let the little children be its messengers ; they will read, again and again, the same blessed words of which our Lord has said, 'The words that I speak unto you they are spirit and they are life.' It is the facts of Holy Scripture on which a child's trust reposes, and this is what will meet the feeble understanding of age. By this patient watering of the heart of the aged with the words of eternal life that very promise will be fulfilled, 'My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass.'

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE sunshine of April had given place to cold east winds, which set in in the latter part of May; and the illness that followed proved as severe as the fever had been in the earlier month of the year. It was one of those seasons so fatal to earth, but wearing a different aspect in heaven. Benjamin Tovel had not taken his spring journey this year: he generally went after Easter, but the generous gift of money from Farmer Burton made it not necessary now, and a misgiving oppressed him. He saw not the face of his child, nor could he measure the food that she took, but he fancied she broke up more of her bread for Sharp, as though appetite failed; and when he took her little hand in his it seemed melting away, so soft and so small, as if it never could grow into that blessing of earth, the hand of a woman. There was no lack of food now, and the blind man opened his store and bought little dainties sometimes, saying, 'They will tempt the child!' He never asked what any thought of her; never said, even to Widow Garson, 'How does the little one look?' and though others saw, how could they tell the blind father that his last earthly joy was fading away? Once little Sue said to him, 'Be we going we travels this Easter-time, daddy?' and he answered, 'No, little one; I think we can bide best at

home: we don't want for money now;' and she answered, 'We'll be glad of that, daddy; we don't like the great mill-wheel and the cold river-side; only we shan't see mammy's grave, and the little flowers we planted there will be all blooming gay.' 'We will go to mammy's grave,' he answered; 'but not for a little while yet.'

Benjamin Tovel said no more, but the shadow fell over him: he felt the child was departing, and he could not see the little face, could not tell what might be written there. One night he lay weeping; when morning rose, he took her hand in his; it was hot with fever; he stooped and kissed her burning cheek: little Sue awoke with the kiss and said, 'Daddy, was that the bright angel?'

'Did you see an angel?' he asked.

'Yes; I thought I was sleeping by my own mammy's side in the pretty churchyard, and that bright angel came, and he took hold of my hand and kissed me while I did sleep, and that woke me. Is mammy woke, too?'

'No, little one, mammy sleeps there still: but the angel will come, and will wake up your own mammy, and baby brother, too.'

'Shall I sleep a little more, daddy? I don't want any breakfast. I like sleep, it's so pretty!'

Benjamin Tovel said, 'Sleep, little one; He who giveth it maketh it sweet to thee!' and he calmly prepared for the day with a spirit resigned, sad but not desolate; for those who daily walk on the confines of heaven feel no strangers there. He marked with deep feeling how the child's form of words changed. The 'we' that was pressed into use on all occasions before was silent and gone; she had said 'I' and 'me' now, like one departing alone; and

yet not alone, for angel forms were nigh : and is it not written, 'He shall carry the lambs in His arms, and fold them in His bosom ?' What companionship of earth can be like unto that ? The strange sound of 'I' and 'me' did enter his heart as with the piercing of a sword, but the balm of life quickly flowed into the wound ; and when he felt faint beneath the stroke, he would murmur, in the low tones he was wont, 'We that have believed do enter into rest,' or, 'We believe that Jesus died and rose again.'

He stepped into Widow Garson's; she was surprised at seeing him, as the child was always his ready messenger. Yet not surprised when he said, 'The little one is ill.' Widow Garson returned with him, she opened the shutter and knelt down by the child, who breathed softly, and smiled in her sleep.

'Shall I send Rachel for the doctor?' Widow Garson asked. 'I fear he cannot save her; she has been long marked for heaven, and her little form has looked almost as if vanishing away.'

'It would be an easement to my mind,' said Benjamin Tovel, 'though she has heard the call, and none can make her stay.'

The widow's children were heart-broken when they heard their mother's quiet words as she said, 'Little Sue will not stay with us long. Rachel, you must go for the doctor ; she is very ill to-day.' Rachel went, and Sammy said, 'Mammy, I cannot sweep my crossing to-day ; I want to sit by little Sue :' for, though born in the same year, he always called her 'little Sue.'

In the afternoon the Doctor came ; he said the child

must have been wasting away for some time, and no medicine could save. He was a kind man, and asked whether they had all they wanted : he seemed pleased at the warm bed-clothes and little comforts around, though he said it was a poor place, and he could wish them a better. In the evening little Sue was quite cheerful, but did not wish to get up ; so they made her bed freshly, and laid her in it again, and Sammy sat by, and she said, 'Have you been sweeping, Sammy ?' and he answered, 'No ; I have been sitting by you.' Then presently she said, 'Sammy, you can't sweep up in heaven ; the streets are all gold and quite clean up there !' and he answered, 'God will give Sammy the works He wants him to do ;' and, after considering, he said, 'I say, little Sue, mammy says we shall see Elijah the prophet, whom the ravens did feed, and I mean to tell him how dear old Smut brought us food.'

'Shall we talk up in heaven ?' asked little Sue.

'Mammy says,' answered Sammy, 'that I may tell the good prophet, and he will like to hear it.'

'We shall sing,' said little Sue ; 'but I can't sing without daddy: I must wait till he comes, unless my own mammy can sing.'

'They all sing in heaven,' said Rachel ; 'the angels can sing : don't you know they came musicking down when our Lord Jesus was born ?'

'He is the Good Shepherd,' said little Sue. 'Daddy, let's say we psalm ;' and they repeated the sweet words, 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want ;' and when the psalm was ended they sang the soul-reviving hymn,—

'The Lord my pasture shall prepare,
And feed me with a shepherd's care ;
His presence shall my wants supply,
And guard me with a watchful eye ;
My noonday walks He shall attend,
And all my midnight hours defend.

When in the sultry glebe I faint,
Or on the thirsty mountain pant,
To fertile vales and dewy meads
My weary, wandering steps He leads,
Where peaceful rivers, soft and slow,
Amid the verdant landscape flow.'

He did not sing the last verse ; beneath the soothing strain little Sue had fallen asleep. She took less notice the next day ; and the third, while they all watched around, she departed in sleep. 'She is gone off like a bird,' Widow Garson said gently ; and truly as the little lark on the earth spreads his glad wings, springs upward, and is lost in the sky, so do the little children hasten heavenward when called to the Good Shepherd's embrace.

No one except the Doctor had come in those few days ; no one knew that sweet little life breathed its fragrance no more upon earth. Benjamin Tovel shed tears of thankfulness, as he felt that his golden store would enable him to fulfil little Sue's dream, and lay her by her own mammy's side, where both would awake when the angel descended to call the happy sleepers to arise from the grave. Leave was readily obtained from the clergyman ; so a soft little bed, amidst daisy-covered turf, was dug, as near as might be to her own mammy's grave. Poor Sharp kept sorrowful watch beside the little sleeper, and would not lie down except where he could see her.

After service on the next Sunday morning, while Farmer Burton was waiting for his chaise, which he was obliged

to have out when Mrs. Burton came with him, as she could not walk the great distance to their own parish-church, he saw the little grave, and asked whose child was dead. The sexton answered, 'The child of the blind man, sir, Benjamin Tovel.' The kind farmer said he felt as if a blow had been struck him. His own child had been saved, and now the blind man's was taken ! And they had not been to see them since that Christmas visit, though, as he said, times and often they had thought about doing so.

He drove in the next day with no object but this, and Mrs. Burton went with him. They found the little shop nearly closed, and the blind man not at work. He said, 'Why should I work now ? It was for her that I toiled.' They went in and sat down by him ; they found him calm, and even thankful. But he said the last cord was loosed that bound him to earth ; he had only now to wait until his own call might come.

'No, no,' said Farmer Burton ; 'you have life before you yet. You must take comfort, my friend, and live while you live. There is much yet to be done : you will find it out in time, if you don't lose the spirit that has borne you up so long. I shall come and see you again, and find you busy at work. I know very well sorrow won't keep a man of your principles idle. But now tell me while I am here, how will you order for to-morrow ?'

'I have spoken for a light cart,' said Benjamin Tovel, 'and we can ride and walk by turns : it cannot be ordered any other way, because of the distance.'

'That will not do,' said Farmer Burton : 'I will send in my light cart and man, then there need be no walking. Let all be done as may best ease your mind. You shall

never want for the money while I or my wife or child are alive; I can answer for them.' Then looking round for his wife, he followed her into the little chamber, which she had silently entered. The shutter was open, and a sunbeam poured in through the high casement, resting on the head of the child like a soft glory; her lips smiled in that deep sleep, and in her little hand Sammy had placed a blue violet. Looking on the child, Mrs. Burton wept as if the grief were her own. Benjamin Tovel, with the quick ear of the blind, heard her weeping, and it comforted him, as he afterwards said, that the tears of earthly mother were shed for his child; though, could her own mammy have seen her, she would have smiled, with the spirit of her child beside her, in heaven.

The next morning they took their leave of the earthly form of little Sue. Ben, Farmer Burton's man, had come with the light cart, and he slipped in softly beside them: the man too was there who came to make all things ready, and though used to such scenes, he wiped away a tear. The child lay as if ready for the angel's kiss of which she had dreamed, and the uplifting touch of his hand. Her blind father stooped, felt for the little fingers, took them, kissed them, and laying them down again said, 'God shall send His angels;' and then he turned away, and Rachel and Sammy went with him, and Ben to his horse in the light cart: but Widow Garson and Sharp stayed and kept watch over all.

Then they set out, in sad yet peaceful procession. Sharp rode with his master beside the little coffin in Farmer Burton's cart, and Widow Garson, Rachel, and Sammy, followed in the other. Many passed them who

said, or who thought, 'There is a child's funeral;' but who could tell what was felt by that little company of mourners, or what the love was that had gathered around that child of the poor? There is One, and only One, who knows the sorrows of every heart—He who asked, 'Where have ye laid him?' And then it is written, 'Jesus wept.'

The cold winds had done their work for that season; they were gone. 'He bringeth the winds out of His treasures,' it is written; and how often they prove the arrows pointed with love, gathering His children home to heaven. Summer had come in, and the blind man in thankfulness inhaled the fragrance of fields, or heard from time to time the notes of a bird not yet retired to the shady covert for noon: even in the soft breeze that fanned his wan cheek he felt the breathing of blessing, and the sense of Nature around him made him feel nearer that heaven which his darling had entered. The young man drove more gently than ever before; he would not so carefully have guided his way had he been called to drive the noble of earth, as he did now that he bore with him the little dead cottage child.

As they went on their way Benjamin Tovel spoke of the hope that is laid up in heaven, and the hope that must answer to it here—'Christ in you the hope of glory.' He spoke of the life that triumphs over death for those whose trust is in the Saviour, 'who died for our sins and rose again for our justification.'

'Well,' said the young man, 'if I be not the better for the few tears I shed over that little angel, it won't be because I have made no resolution.'

'That's right so far,' said Benjamin Tovel; 'but re-

member my words,—no good resolution ever held that was not bound fast with a prayer. We be wholly weakness ourselves, but prayer binds us to God, and He becomes our strength.'

At the churchyard gate the little procession was formed. The blind man, led by his dog, followed as chief mourner; while Sharp's downcast look expressed the poor animal's sympathy. Then followed Widow Garson with Rachel and Sammy: Sammy had a band of black crape round his cap and around his coat-sleeve, but his sad little face was his deepest mourning for Sue. They wound through the churchyard, and the white-robed minister came out to meet them as the herald of life. They entered the church—that church of memories to the blind man; but to the eyes of the understanding, when divinely enlightened, a door is opened in heaven, and the glory and the gladness that are there blend their radiance with the sadness and the tears that are here, creating a rainbow of promise on the dark cloud of death, mingling earth and heaven by the love that is light. The blind man saw not the scene now passing around him, but he knew well how many feet from the pathway lay the small space of green sod where they had made ready the resting-place for little Sue. But the Widow Garson saw all, and, to her surprise, saw their friends gathered there: Farmer Burton, with his wife by his side; Olivia, with Mrs. Brame; and Patience, in the Sunday mourning she had worn for her own little Peace. Michael had heard the tidings: he had borne them to Patience, and Patience had sent Jem to break, as gently as might be, to Miss Campbell the death of her little friend.

It was not until all was over that the blind man's courage gave way, and he said to Widow Garson,—

‘I will stay here beside her, the nights are kindly warm now; how can I go back to the home where she is not?’

Then a voice—it was the orphan Olivia's, whose sweet tones he well remembered, recalling all the comfort he had himself given in the past,—that same voice said,—

‘My friend, our little Sue is not here: we must go up to heaven if we wish to be with her. But must we not wait for the voice that will say in the right time to each one, “Come up hither?”’

Alas! the empty home looked too desolate, and he answered again,—

“‘The child is not; and I, whither shall I go?’” Then he felt his hand pressed in a woman's kindly hands, and a voice fell on his ear,—

‘My father, you know a home will be ready for you! you must come there as soon as ever you be ready for it. Alice calls you grandfather, and my husband is always at work on a finish to all that never will be quite ended until you be come in.’ And a gush of life passed through the heart of the mourner as he thought on the home that seemed so like his own. And these kindly voices of friends rose in the darkness like stars on his night, and recalled to the blind man that blessed assurance that goodness and mercy followed him still.

They feared that the dog might not be willing to leave the little grave by which he lay, and they thought, if he refused the string, it would arouse the grief of the mourner afresh. But Benjamin Tovel knew the dog, and spoke to

him, and said, 'Come, Sharp, we must go; you won't leave your poor master!' and the dog rose up and led him, and they went back to the town. Widow Garson lighted up a fire, and made tea for them all in Benjamin Tovel's own home, and she put all things in order, and they sat with him there, and sang hymns and conversed until the gloom lightened around him, and they left the mourner in peace.

There was a step in the churchyard that evening. The sun was setting, and the evening star led on the twilight; the summer dews fell, and all was hushed, save the song of the birds in the branches around. It was a labourer's footfall, known well from all other, as it treads flatly and firmly on the earth that it tills. Yet he trod softly, as reverently he drew near to the little new-made grave, where the young child was laid. He stood awhile looking down on that small spot of earth, then up to the heavens, where the sunset glory still lingered. He looked once around him—all was lonely and still; then uncovering his head, he bent his knees in prayer by the grave, giving thanks for the little child who had led him to pray. It was Lockwood the thrasher. Even so it often is; the gentlest influence, when the Holy Spirit gives it power, will recall the wanderer to the embrace of the Eternal Father. Lockwood lingered there till the shadows fell and the stars looked down from the sky; then he took his way home, become himself as a little child: 'for of such is the kingdom of heaven.'

CHAPTER XXV.

OLIVIA drove into the town the next day, to see her blind friend after his return to his desolate home. She did not drive up to the shop, but walked down the familiar lane. She stood at the door, the upper half of which was open ; but, quick as the ear of the blind man was, he did not hear her light step. He was at his work again, twisting his willow withes alone, the dog only beside him ; and as he worked he was murmuring to himself, in a voice so low that none but those who knew well both the voice and the words could have traced the meaning of the sounds : ‘ Who are these which are arrayed in white robes, and whence came they ? ’ Olivia stood in silence. Sharp did not move, only looked at her. When the blind man had almost ended that vision of heaven, and came to the words, ‘ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more,’ a tear rolled down his furrowed cheek, and he worked on in silence, as though he waited for strength to utter the last words. But when he continued silent the dog rose and greeted Olivia, who spoke, and the blind man heard her voice, and welcomed her in with a smile. She found him turning peacefully and thankfully to life again, — life, lonely and darkened so far as outward observation could see, but invisibly to sight illumined with a light and enriched with a companionship, all the relationships of

earth could not equal or supply. The visit was full of comfort to Olivia, and cheered the heart of the mourner in his silent home.

Olivia afterwards saw Widow Garson and her children. Sammy was at home and silent, but no fear then crossed the heart of his mother or his friend for him. He would not take out his broom, which had been his daily business and pleasure before, but his mother thought this natural ; she soon, however, began to feel that he would never go again. He sickened with the same low fever as little Sue. The fever had not been thought infectious, but in that little close room it probably proved so ; or the same cause that led to its attack on little Sue might bring Sammy under its power, for, like her, he had long been a delicate child, one who looked as if he could never struggle with life temporal, but must fade from earthly sight into that better life eternal. Like little Sue he had known years of privation and cold, when food and clothing were scanty, and this weakens the strength and often ends life in its childhood. It is so with countless children born of the poor, they tread their brief pathway with many infant sorrows ; but their race is early run, and we look up in trust that He whose compassions fail not will receive the helpless children whom poverty, or crime, slays by thousands.

Little Sammy had been brought up with all the care, and was nursed with all the tenderness a mother's love could bestow ; and yet she could not grieve for him, she said. He had slept from his birth cradled on her arm, and she had not known how to think of him in the world alone. She had trusted that God would make all things work together for his good, however sad or hard to bear

they might be at the time; and now she saw it was appointed that her child should breathe his last upon his mother's bosom, and be safely gathered to the mansions above, before she was called to enter there; and this came as an answer of peace to her earnest prayers, though not in the way she had expected. But death is only a shadow to those who walk with Christ, and they are made willing to follow Him through darkness or through light. Like little Sue's, his illness was short and almost painless; the silver cord was soon loosed, and the golden bowl quickly broken. He murmured the dear names of earth and heaven: it was now—'the Good Shepherd,' then 'Mammy,' and 'little Sue,' a three-fold cord, two entwinings of which were in heaven, and they loosened the third that bound him to earth; and so, without fear, his infant spirit trod the shore whose light hides the departed from our earthly sight.

Widow Garson, who had hastened to write of joy, did not write now her tale of bereavement, but waited until Olivia might come. Indeed the little boy had been taken, before she was aware how brief and gentle an illness would release him for heaven. It was nearly three weeks before Olivia was able to go in again. On her next visit to Ivy Lane she was ascending the long familiar staircase, when the woman who lived on the ground-floor, and had the care of letting the rooms of the house, opened her door and looked up the staircase.

'Do you want the Widow Garson, miss?' the woman asked. 'She is not at home; will you please to step into my room?'

Olivia returned to the room below.

‘Is Widow Garson out for the day?’ Olivia asked.

‘No, she has not stepped out long, but her girl went out with her, and I think it likely she may be taking her cup of tea with Master Tovel; she does that sometimes, for since the death of the child, ’tis terrible lonely for him in his blindness.’

‘Is Sammy with her?’ asked Olivia.

‘Oh, then you don’t know!’ the woman said kindly; ‘I was just afraid you might not: the poor child died last week.’

‘Sammy dead!’ exclaimed Olivia, and she burst into tears.

She had come with thoughts full of the loss of one sweet child, and found the other was taken. The woman was affected at seeing her grief, and said,—

‘Well, ’tis plain the rich friends don’t make you slight the poor ones! But don’t ye fret for the child, the mother herself can’t be long here, and what then could the poor little weakling have done? If the ewe dies there be plenty will nourish the lambkin, but who would care to nurture up the poor weak child of a widow? He must have gone to the workhouse, and that would have soon been the end of him there! It was better by far he should die as he did in his own mother’s arms, and never meet the rough world that would scarce have given him a shelter.’

This well-meant consolation did not comfort Olivia. She, too, was left an orphan, and she had found a shelter. How deep and how true was the love that had shielded her, though beforehand it had itself seemed forbidding and cold; might it not have been so with Sammy? Surely, she felt, when the children of the Father of heaven and

earth need a refuge, He who opens all hearts at His pleasure, will provide them a home. And in the shock of this second loss, like the other unthought of beforehand, she felt as if all her childhood had held dear were departing. She wept on, unable to regain composure, and the poor woman, who had a worldly hardness of nature, was more softened by this gush of tears than by any influence she had come under before. All Ivy Lane knew how the blind officer's child, that used to come backwards and forwards amongst them, had, when left alone in the world, been "made one of the family up at the great house," for so they expressed it ; and now she grieved as if her own kindred were gone, because the poorest children in Ivy Lane had died, and 'natural enough,' the woman thought, 'that they should die !' This unworldly love, this pure attachment in feeling, gave that poor hard-natured woman, as she afterwards said, the first notion she ever had of a love beyond her own understanding.

But now, having expended her best consolation on Olivia in vain, she did not know what more to say ; yet greatly wishing to console her, and being naturally never long at a loss where words were required, she began again in a new strain of comfort.

'Now I say, don't ye fret ; why, there be plenty more children about in the town, scores and scores, as I say, too many by half ; if your fancy lies that way you may soon find another ; though I will say,—and who can know better than I ? for the boy was born and bred in this house, and the little one in and out here almost like her home,—I never did see two children better natured than they ; they always had a smile for you, however cross you

might be, and would run on an errand as if you did them a favour. But then, don't ye know 'tis the best that be taken, and likely they should be if they be wanted for heaven ; and if God Almighty take a fancy to them, in course they must go, and it don't belong to them that wish them well to make a sorrow of that.'

Strange as the woman's words sounded, they did comfort Olivia ; the thought that the children she loved were taken and gone because they were wanted and wished for in heaven, gave an elevation to her feelings, that perhaps would not at that moment have been given so effectually by those who might have a far better knowledge of the good providence of God. Olivia recovered her composure, with a grateful smile at the woman for the effort she had made to cheer her ; the woman felt a true pleasure at having done so, and said, ' Shall I just run in and see, and fetch the poor woman here ?'

' No, thank you,' said Olivia : ' I am better now, and can call in there ; your kind words have done me good.'

' That's more than ever I expected,' said the woman ; ' I thought gentlefolks gave out good words to the poor, but had no notion they could take any back again from them.'

' You make a great mistake in that,' said Olivia ; ' I am sure I have received a great deal more comfort and happiness in my visits to Ivy Lane than I ever felt able to give.'

' Well, I don't know,' said the woman ; ' perhaps, after all, I don't see quite so clear to the bottom of all things as I have considered that I did in my long life.'

Olivia now gave her hand to the woman in a grateful

farewell, but as she turned to the door the woman said,—

‘Perhaps if you should be this way again, you would step in for a few minutes. I don’t say but what I do sometimes feel ignorant, and doubt whether I may be all right after all; and a little talk is pleasant if you can find a friend.’

Olivia readily promised to call. She had never been asked into that room before, and this invitation, with the feeling it expressed, seemed given to cheer her in her fresh sorrow.

We need not try to tell how that little company of friends met, gathered in Benjamin Tovel’s little home, but we can tell that they parted with smiles, each had comforted the other. There is no surer way of gaining comfort ourselves than by the effort to comfort others. The light of consolation that we might not be able to receive in direct rays, we can see in reflection when it falls on another.

It was the summer evening when Olivia returned; she was glad to see no one on entering, and went straight to her room. The smile with which she had parted from the friends whose best hopes were above was gone, and as she thought of the children who had lived before her eyes like the twin joys of her life, her spirit failed her again. She heard a knock at her door, and for the first time felt a wish not to meet at that moment her maternal friend Mrs. Brame. It was not that Mrs. Brame would not be all kindness to her, but how could she understand her feeling such grief for the loss of two little children nursed on poverty’s scant bread, and never likely to be

fitted for life? Yet she answered 'Come in,' with the best courage she had ; she did not look round, ashamed of her tears, but in a moment felt it was not Mrs. Brame who had entered her room. She turned, and Lady Gertrude stood before her, who, seeing her grief, said, 'My poor child, what is it? some fresh sorrow befallen?' Olivia threw herself into those tender arms that opened to receive her, and sobbing, said, 'Sammy is dead !'

Lady Gertrude sat down with Olivia beside her, and did not leave her again until grief had calmed into peace. Lady Gertrude could well understand, in the lonely weight of care Olivia had borne through her earlier years, the sweetness that little Sue and Sammy had shed on her life; while the blind father of the one, and the widowed mother of the other, had been to her an instructor, and a strengthener of faith. There was blessing in the outpouring of sorrow to one who could comprehend sorrow's history, though in words but half told. And when she had ceased speaking, Lady Gertrude gently said,

'These griefs are the chastening of your heavenly Father's love. It is not many whom He calls to such early service as that to which He has called you. But it is good to bear His yoke in our youth ; if any bear that yoke it is a proof that He is walking beside them enabling them to lean on the help of His heavenly grace. And is not this far better and far happier than the easiest path without Him ?'

'Yes,' answered Olivia ; her whole soul gave the response ; and she was comforted.

Then Lady Gertrude said, 'Now you must rest here in this easy-chair where I have been sitting. How sweet the

twilight is by this open window, and the evening star inviting us to look above! I will send Brame with refreshments for you; you must try to take what she brings, and then lie down and sleep.'

Mrs. Brame was anxiously watching, but had not gone in, finding her lady was there. On seeing Brame in waiting near the door, Lady Gertrude said,—

'Have you heard that the little boy is dead?'

Mrs. Brame answered, 'No; but it is well for the child: only I am afraid she will vex herself, she had such a love for those children.'

'I hope not,' said Lady Gertrude; 'it was natural she should grieve, but she is happier now. Do not let her talk much to-night. She says the poor widow looks as if sinking fast. I think you must go in to-morrow, but do not tell her until your return: it would be too much for her to go in again.'

Olivia was quite ready for her dear old friend when she entered, and took her cordials, and Mrs. Brame was pleased at her not giving way to sorrow, and persuaded her to go at once to rest for the night.

As Lady Gertrude passed by the door after her visit to her sleeping children, she saw Mrs. Brame leaving Olivia's room.

'Is your child asleep?' asked Lady Gertrude, with a smile.

'Yes,' she answered; 'I waited until she was off, for she has wept too many tears in the years that are past, I am sure, to make them good for her now.'

'Shall I go in?' said the Lady Gertrude.

Mrs. Brame looked pleased at this proposal. She

went in first and drew back the curtains where Olivia was sleeping. The Lady Gertrude looked upon her in the sweet promise of her early youth, left friendless in the world by all who should have hastened to shelter her. But she had been given to them ; they had welcomed the charge, and the broad shield of a tenderness that would not fail was over her now. Lady Gertrude knelt a moment beside her, in thankfulness to Him who intrusts His precious jewels to those whom He knows will cherish them, then kissed the fair brow, thinking it would not awake the slumber that seemed so silent and deep, but Olivia looked up. 'Sleep on, dear child,' she said, 'I came to look at you. May God ever bless you, and make you a blessing !' and under that benediction she slept. And the tie that bound the orphaned girl to the Lady Gertrude's heart grew deeper and stronger, and Olivia's slumbers were sweetened by memories of the beautiful form that on the night of her sorrow bent over her in blessing.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONSTANCE and Alfred heard the next day of the loss of their little friend Sammy. It was the first time the children had known the loss of a friend; they felt solemn and sad; but if for awhile all things looked less bright it was only as the shadow of the angel's wing passing over them, bearing the happy spirit of little Sammy away. Olivia took them to make a visit to the cottage of Patience, and told them on their way of Patience preparing a home for the blind man and his dog. They knew well the story of the dog who saved the child in the river, and was nursed by Patience and Jem, and how faithful he was to his poor blind master. And the thought of the blind man and the dog both coming to live in Jem's cottage greatly interested them. Olivia too felt the comfort of a visit to Patience, who had already become to her as a friend; so they went all three together to the cottage. Benjamin Tovel had said to Olivia that he felt nothing could beguile him in the days of his absence from his own little Sue, like the sweet innocent ways of the babes in that house. And the thought of such a home for the blind man seemed to have lifted the weight of care for him from the thankful heart of the Widow Garson. She felt also the grateful return which he made, that he would not leave his desolate home while she was still spared,

staying that he might be a comfort to her. Widow Garson spoke of the future as one who truly felt that life here is not divided from life in heaven, but is the same life flowing on, only passing for a moment through the shadows of the valley, then breaking forth afresh with immortal vigour in its course.

The children were to see the little room prepared for the blind man; and Olivia described to them how he did his work, how he twisted the willows in his blindness, with his dog watching beside him, and the care that Sharp took of the baskets, and then she said,—

‘I will ask him if he will make his two first little baskets, one for Consy and one for Alf, to carry their own gifts in to poor old Dolly and Nat.’

‘But he does not know us,’ said Constance; ‘and we must not ask for a basket. Could not we save up our money and pay for them?’

‘Yes,’ said Olivia, ‘you could easily do that; they would not cost much, and he would be pleased to have an order as soon as he comes; it would make him feel happier to sit down to his work and be earning his bread, and you could come and see how he makes them.’

‘Will he like me to come and read to him?’ said Alfred, ‘as Consy does to old Dolly? I can read now!’

‘Yes, I am sure he will,’ said Olivia; ‘it would make him happier than anything else you could do: the Bible makes darkness light for him.’

‘I know what I shall do,’ said little Alfred, ‘I shall take care of him as papa did of Old Willy; grandmamma often tells me about that; and I shall keep my little

basket and carry him things, and poor Sharp too—I wish he were come !’

Olivia did not tell the children why Benjamin Tovel waited for a time before coming ; it was enough for them to know of the loss of friends when it came. So in this happy converse they reached the cottage. They were full of interest about the home that Patience and Jem were making for the blind man and his faithful dog. Patience rejoiced in the feeling, and took them into the pleasant room they had prepared. The cheerful look it already wore, told that the hand of love had been there ; it opened, like her own room, into the garden ; sweet flowers bloomed about its window and beside the door ; and though the blind man would not be able to see them, yet he was more keenly sensible to their fragrance than others were, and this supplied the place of sight to him. At length the children appeared satisfied, and Olivia sat down for quiet converse with Patience. When it was ended, and she rose to leave, the children were not in sight. She looked around in vain ; but turning again to the blind man’s room she saw them both seated there, each on a little stool they had found ; and when she said, ‘ Are you here all alone ? ’ little Alfred answered, ‘ We only came to sit here a little, and ‘magine all about it.’ Dear child, would that all opening fancy were filled with imaginations bright and blessed as thine !

Mrs. Brame had been in to see Widow Garson, and on her return expressed her fear that the life that food and warmth had revived was now fast sinking. Hearing this, Lady Gertrude said she would go in and see the poor woman. It was not that she felt any doubt of Mrs.

Brame's faithful care, nor of Olivia's solacing power, but Lady Gertrude said,—

‘She is a mother, and it is right that a mother's heart should meet hers, and know her last wishes for the orphan child that she leaves.’

Lady Gertrude took Olivia in with her, and sent her to cheer her blind friend, while she went alone to the widow's room. She found her sitting by her little fire, though the day was warm in the sunshine of summer. Widow Garson knew in a moment whose the presence must be that now entered her room; rising, she took the offered hand in both of hers, and warm tears of love and thankfulness were the welcome she gave. Then Lady Gertrude sent Rachel on to Benjamin Tovel's, to see her friend Miss Campbell there; for she felt that, left alone with her, the widow would speak freely all she wished for her child.

Rachel ran delighted to the basket-maker's; she found Olivia seated in the small shop; and Rachel took little Sue's place, and gave the blind man the willow withes, which he received as was his wont, only you did not hear the words often and tenderly repeated before, ‘Now, little one, quick!’ when the child had turned to talk with Sharp, or to some other variety in her quiet life. Rachel was happy in sight of her friend; and she was used to listen to converse on all subjects engaging the interest of the older minds under whom her own had been trained.

The widow looked on the friend before her, and felt she could speak more freely all that was in her heart than she had ever done before, except with her blind neighbour Benjamin Tovel. When the Lady Gertrude spoke of her

child, and invited her to tell her all her wishes; the poor widow replied,—

‘I think the workhouse is best for her; she is not yet ten years old; she is tall of her age, and her strength is not grown to her size. I know in small places the work is apt to be heavy; people don’t mean unkindness, but they do not measure the strength of a child. Her natural place is the workhouse, and I don’t wish it otherwise. She will pick up more schooling, and have wholesome food, and early rest of a night, and grow up to a place of service. She is a pleasant child, and will, I hope, make friends, and if I might trust to a kind word from you, my lady, to those under whom she is placed, the thought that you would know where they sent her to service, and that Miss Campbell would speak a word to keep her in mind of the way she should walk in, this is all I crave, and it will ease the only care that rests on my spirit.’

The promise to watch over her child was given, given with that tenderness that doubly endeared every gift, whether it were from the hand or a promise from the lips. But the Lady Gertrude still lingered in that little upper room; and who could wonder, for she saw in that poor lonely widow, whom her hand had raised from sinking in want, one who was clothed in the white raiment and washed in the blood of the Lamb; purified and refined in the fire of tribulation, and waiting but the last gale of His love to loose the cable, weigh anchor, and sail from the shore, to that better land, whose light beamed on her spirit even now, and where she, who had sat as a lonely widow on earth, would receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

When Mrs. Brame heard the poor widow's choice for her child to go and wait her age for service in the work-house, she was silent at first, then said, 'No doubt the poor woman is right; she has the wisdom of death in which to judge of life, and we do not see things in that light as yet.' Many felt surprise that Mrs. Brame should approve—Mrs. Brame, who had always thought the work-house next door to the prison in the loss of respectability. But old things were passed away with Mrs. Brame now. In past years her own opinion and her own way were all important to her, but she now felt a respect for the opinion and an interest in the wishes of others. She had become more swift to hear, more slow to speak. This was because, instead of self, divine charity now reigned in her heart. Charity includes other graces, and chief of these humility. We may test the amount of our charity by the depth of our humility. Charity then is to be especially cultivated, because all other graces grow with it. It was so with Mrs. Brame; charity had taken possession of her heart, and, try her in any way now, you would find the answering grace.

Olivia and Mrs. Brame now made frequent visits to Ivy Lane. Nothing seemed so much to interest Mrs. Brame as to sit quietly beside the dying woman, and listen to the expression of her faith and hope. Mrs. Brame said little, but her eye and her hand were quick and ready to supply all that could relieve. The little shop was often closed, and the blind man cheering the chamber; and the widow said, 'No one could believe how it lifts you up above the body's death, to hear the very life of heaven breathing from his lips.'

The neighbour who occupied the room that had been Mrs. Brame's, had taken of late to step up to Widow Garson, to see, as she said, 'if there were a hand's turn she could do for her.' It is rare to find a poor woman who does not soften before sickness, and lend her best help in its aid. This poor woman had had no kind feeling for Widow Garson. She thought Widow Garson was getting all the notice because she had fostered an old woman's stray cat; but when she became better acquainted with her neighbour, a very different feeling awoke in her mind. She saw her patient suffering, her meek submission, and humble trust; her great thankfulness, too, for any little help her neighbours gave, or kind feeling they showed. 'She seemed,' the poor woman said, 'to set as much store by the hand's turn I did her, as if she had no rich folks to enter her door.' This poor woman often longed that the same thankful spirit which made all seem so pleasant to Widow Garson could dwell in her own discontented soul. And sometimes, when she left that upper chamber she would shut her own door and kneel and pray for this. The neatness of the widow's room struck her also, with its restful look of comfort, and all kept by such a child as Rachel. She tried to keep her own in better order, and found that it helped her temper when her room looked tidy and clean, and her husband's temper too, when he came home of an evening tired with the day's work. Then she thought within herself, 'Now I have begun I will make a finish. I will keep my rooms in order, and the children, and my own temper and tongue; I will be like that good woman, and see how it answers.' But alas! this was easier said than

done. She could not order the unruly wills and affections of her own heart, could not even tame her tongue; and at length, quite discouraged, she told Widow Garson that evil had got such a mastery over her, that she could not bring it under, though she had passed her word that she would!

The dying woman smiled, and taking her neighbour's hand in both hers, said, 'It is God who puts it into our hearts to try, but He knows we cannot do it of ourselves; it needs a mightier than we to put down evil within, and when we find we cannot do it, then He bids us cry unto Him. Go to Jesus with all; go to Him when you try, and when you don't try; when you conquer yourself, and when you fall; go always to Him; tell Him all. He will listen, and help, and pardon, and cleanse you; and sure as the day rises out of the night, so sure if you hold on light will spring up within you, until it rises a heavenly day without fear of darkness, as it does through His goodness and mercy now for me.'

'But won't He be angered when we slip into wrong?' asked the poor woman.

'Not angered,' said the dying widow, 'when He knows we do want in our hearts to do right. He is never angered with those who look to Him for forgiveness. He is grieved when we sin: He wept tears over sinners, and sure the least we can do is to weep for our sins. But if we be sorry and confess our sin, and look to Him for forgiveness, He will take it all away, and teach us how to overcome it by looking unto Him. There is no other way to heaven, only looking unto Jesus; that brings us comfort here, as well as leads us straight there.'

One day the poor woman came in leading her children, fresh-washed and clad; she brought them up to the bed and said, 'Here, neighbour, I want you to give my poor babes your blessing. Maybe it will bide on them when you are safe from all harm.'

'My blessing would be nothing of itself,' said Widow Garson, 'but as a prayer to God it is much, for He does answer prayer. Never one prayer from any heart for His mercy and blessing that was ever crossed with denial. All things else may seem vain, but prayer never can be. If it come from our heart, and be asked for our Saviour's sake, it will go straight into His, and come back with a blessing. If it seem long in coming, wait for it, it will come; never one prayer lost its way, nor one answer from Him: they be always coming and going, and the way always stands open. If you begin to count up the blessed answers, you will soon have to give in, for they will be more than ever you can reckon. Our Lord Jesus is just a friend always by us, and we must take Him for that, and live with Him day and night, and our poor life will grow rich, and our sorrows find comfort, and all our sins will be clean lost and gone for ever in His precious blood.'

Then Widow Garson laid her hand on the head of those little children, and prayed for heavenly blessings upon them. That hand that had toiled for daily bread, that had laboured for others, that had often been clasped in prayer. Its earthly work was all over, this was its last act—to be lifted in blessing.

The sunrise may be bright, but the sunset glory excels. So the light that gathers around the dying Christian

is often more glorious than the joy that awoke at his new and heavenly birth. When passed from our horizon a radiance still lingers, and the memory of the just becomes blessed. So it was with Widow Garson; all remembered her with love. The neighbour took her child to comfort her for a time. Then, when she could delay no longer, she took little Rachel to the workhouse, and cheered her up with many a promise to come and see her there. Benjamin Tovel was at work in his shop when Rachel came to wish him good-bye. The little orphan girl was his last tie to Ivy Lane, and he felt much the parting with her.

‘My dear child,’ he said, ‘your best Friend goes with you. When the workhouse door shuts on you, it shuts on Him too. He will bide with you there. Say your prayers to His ear, He will be listening to hear, and will answer each one in His own best way and time. And if you have to cry, my poor orphan, give your tears to Him too; whether you have done right or wrong, never cry to yourself alone, think always of your Saviour; He knows what tears be; He will care for yours, even more than a mother. And if you do wrong, humble your spirit, confess it to God, and to man; own to the fault, and you will be forgiven. There be some in this hard world that would sooner bear anything than say, “I am sorry;” that’s pride in the heart; keep pride out of yours by the lowly meekness of the Holy Child Jesus. Remember pride drove the devil out of heaven, and pride will keep you out if you nurse it up. Forget yourself, young one, and think how best to do for others, and you will find a home and be happy in the workhouse. Think on your dear mother and tread in her ways. I shall think on

you daily, and lift up my prayer for heavenly blessings upon you.'

So little Rachel entered the workhouse, and its door shut upon her.

The poor woman who had nursed the widow so kindly was willing to give Smut a home, but when he found his friends were gone he left the house too, no one knew when or where. Mrs. Brame heard of his departure unmoved, saying, 'He will shift for himself, and soon find a home.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

JULY had ripened the corn, and the reapers were mustering their gang. The day was fixed for the sickle to be in, but the first sheaf had not fallen. When Farmer Smith trod his harvest-fields the corn reached to his shoulders—straw as well as corn was so abundant that year; and William's fields were waving gold. How beautiful the expanded surface when the breeze passing over waved it in undulations, like the swell of a lake; and the deep green of the foliage, with the glowing hue of the corn, made that rich contrast that fills the eye and rejoices every heart when harvest begins!

Joe was faithful to his promise: he came down before the day, and led on the reapers, who hailed him as king, and marched out to the field with green boughs waving in the wind, and delighted saw him toiling to keep on at their head, as each strong white-gloved hand held the sickle, and the long golden swathes fell; and they sang for Master Joe their first halloo largess when the sun had set in the sky, and the stars came out to listen as their deep voices made the welkin ring echo to that joyous harvest-song.

August had come in, with its settled heat and still weather: no leaf stirred on the trees, no breeze rippled the brook, nor rumbling waggon as yet hasted to field.

Patience sat alone in her cottage, her children slept tired with the heat; she was at work, but her busy needle stopped every now and then, and she looked as one listening for some expected sound, but it came not, and she worked on again. Then she mused on the harvest, how fair the fields lay, and what people said of the land Master William had in hand. Not like to that he left; but he had been chief in making that what it was, and no doubt he would bring the other round after a bit: such a man for work and for business, and yet such a heart for goodness, too! How one mind could carry all Patience wondered to think; but then she came to a conclusion, as she always did in her thoughts, and this conclusion was that goodness biggins the mind, for she said,—‘I see that in my mistress, there’s room for all in her mind now, and one thing don’t vex another as it used to do in years that are gone. To my thinking, her mind holds a hundred things in it for one that lodged there before, and yet they don’t trouble one another, nor interfere as they used to do, one running a-head of the other to trouble and hurry, but all ordered so quiet as you might almost say each one had the whole to itself. There can be no doubt, then, that goodness does biggen!’ And Patience looked up and said: ‘Oh, that our poor hearts might grow larger by the harbouring of this good Christian man, Benjamin Tovel!’

Then she started, and laid her work down. ‘There he be! that is old Dodman’s step, drawing the tumbril, with Jem by the side. I am sure it is he.’ And Patience hastened out. There was nothing to be seen; but the slow, heavy step drew near, and the roll of the heavy wheel.

Patience watched: then a horse's head appeared round the corner: it was old Dodman, and Jem, whip in hand, by his side, slow-pacing along, and here and there an end of furniture peered over the tumbril. Jem nodded cheerily, and they came slowly on. Patience lifted out the garden-stile, and waited beside it. The tumbril drew up, and there in the middle, on the soft bedding, sat Benjamin Tovel, and Sharp by his side.

'My father!' said Patience.

'Blessings on you!' he answered. 'I am come to make my home with you, only one step from heaven!'

Patience took him into her room; and, seated in the arm-chair, he asked: 'Where be the babes?' And Patience answered,—'If they dream you be come they won't be long in waking!'

Then she went out to Jem, and they took the furniture into the room made ready for it. Jem went back to the farm with the horse and tumbril, getting home as early as he could to set things straight before night.

It was plain that Sharp remembered the place: he looked at each familiar spot, then went and lay down on the hearth-rug. Patience had her kettle boiling in her little back kitchen, for she said, 'He will be spent with the journey.' But Benjamin Tovel would not take anything until Jem came home to their evening meal; so she took up the children, and brought them down to him, and then went to begin putting things in order. Jem came home early; then they all went to supper; and that cheerfulness reigned which, having risen above sadness, has in its hallowed gentleness an elevating influence.

While at supper, to the surprise of Patience and Jem,

Michael came in, for he had taken a sorrowful leave of his almost daily visits to the cottage, having let himself this harvest to the very farm where Benjamin Tovel was shepherd; he was to make his harvest there, and then take his place as one of the horsemen; and he lodged in the cottage of Lockwood the thrasher. He said they were scarce into harvest as yet, so his master had given him a chance of a few hours that day, and he did not value the distance for the comfort of seeing the place and old friends again. He was as pleased as a child to find Benjamin Tovel and the dog. Sharp remembered him at once, and Michael said he should make his way home by his old master's, Farmer Burton's, for he was promised at all times a kind welcome there, and he would be thankful to hear that Master Tovel and the dog were safe in such a good homestead at last. They hastened their evening worship that Michael might be with them, and little Alice was allowed to sit up. Jem said they could have 'Praise' sung as it should be now their friend was come home; and then, full of thankfulness, the blind man went to his pleasant room to rest. He did not sleep much, for the day had been one of deep feeling, but he lay thinking on that gracious Providence without which not a sparrow can fall. At that season of the year no night really darkens, only a soft shadow rests over Nature. He saw not the twilight as it deepened or brightened, but his ear caught the notes of the nested birds under the thatched eaves, and his spirit awoke with that first voice of home to the gladness of day.

With the morning all nature breathed freshness for him. He who had never known the confines of a town,

except in those few years of his little shop in Ivy Lane, now felt invigorated as every sense expanded in the surroundings of the country. Even sight seemed in measure supplied, for the scenes of Nature were pictured on his mental eye, and the dear voices around him were all sounds of joy. Patience at her door saw his was open, and turned to see if he were ready for her; and as she looked she saw his face raised upward, and heard him say, 'This home on earth, and that home in heaven!'

The morning was still early when William, riding over to look at his father's reapers, stopped at the stile to inquire for Benjamin Tovel. He had come round by the lane on purpose, and stepped into his little room; and busy as he was, with two farms waiting on his hand, he found the few minutes in which to sit beside the blind man and give him a welcome.

Patience had been obliged to promise faithfully that she would let Alfred and Constance know when Benjamin Tovel and his dog were come; so Jem had to call round that morning, leaving word at the gamekeeper's lodge, the gamekeeper looking out of his window, for none were yet stirring when Jem's early footstep passed by. Jem did not work in the gang of reapers, though they often wished for him there, but took piece-work, on account of his sheep and other concerns which he best knew how to keep right for his master. So Jem stood alone in a sea of waving grain, and thought of his home, to which he felt as if an angel had come. And this feeling was natural; it gathered its heavenly glow from the past as well as the present, for all the memories of youth now

pictured Old Willy to him in those exquisite hues that remembrance can paint, but which no artist can reflect on the canvas. And this feeling was true, for we may so appropriate the words of an Apostle. — Jem and Patience had not been ‘forgetful to entertain strangers,’ and they had ‘entertained angels unawares.’

The gamekeeper faithfully reported at the Hall that Benjamin Tovel and the dog were safe at the cottage of Jem; and the servant who took the message faithfully reported the same. A shout of gladness received it; those young hearts were born to be a blessing to earth, overflowing with sympathy's glow! But what was now to be done? Had the Lady Gertrude been present, all the materials of school would have yielded to childhood's appeal; but Olivia was teaching that day, and she powerfully persuaded, and effectually prevailed, that the morning should be given to lessons and the afternoon spent in the cottage of Jem. Accordingly the work was done, with certain pauses between, not for words, but young imaginings that had left the present scene, where sums in addition, and letters in a copy-book, and various lesson-books, lay awaiting the leisure of the young wandering spirits, that returned, with something like an out-of-breath sigh, to apply their best powers to the duties before them.

The afternoon came, and eager feet and happy faces set out for the visit to the cottage of Jem. It proved a happy time to arrive: Benjamin Tovel was only then seated, with willow withes around him, and Sharp at his side, exactly as Olivia had so often described. Little Alfred and Constance were friends with him at once,

delighted to watch the blind man at work, to give him their order, to hear how pretty their own little baskets would be, to receive the invitation to come and see him at work on them, and, in short, to listen to all the blind man would say. There was a charm to children in the way that he spoke; he had never known the child that did not give him its love: this gave a fresh confidence, strengthening his power. Sharp, too, though the life was gone from his eye, and a sad indifference to most things hung over the dog, yet the caresses of a child were dear to him still. He knew just the ways that most please a child; and Olivia began to fear that life would in future be rather too equally divided by the children between the great house and the cottage of Jem; while Patience looked on with a motherly smile, and little Alice ran behind Benjamin Tovel as he sat at his low work, and threw her little arms round his neck, and nestled her head by his, and said, 'Grandfather!' and he answered, 'Bless you, my pretty one!' and she ran contented away.

In a day or two Mr. and Mrs. Burton drove over, greatly pleased at the pleasant change for Benjamin Tovel. They found him at work on the little fancy baskets for Alfred and Constance; and Farmer Burton said, 'Ah, that's well, my friend; work is Nature's order; and I believe that the idle will find they have never yet truly lived! But, mind you, your work is to be no longer for bread. You have a son and daughter here who have made you a home, and we shall look out to keep bread on your board: but that need not hinder you keeping yourself and others rich with your work; and if we cannot get you to us, we shall come over here every now and then to see

how you are.' So it was that a circle of affection, gladness, and blessing, gathered around the blind man in the cottage of Jem.

A change now took place in this village rectory. The minister who had laboured long and faithfully there was appointed to a higher office, and obliged to leave the people of his charge, who were greatly endeared to him. The tidings fell sorrowfully on all, but on none so acutely as on Mrs. Smith. She had never said much to him; her silent habit kept her from much speaking: but she always welcomed his coming with her best cheer, and no disastrous weather ever kept her from church. He had sometimes felt her constant silence, not knowing that she had said, when such a man entered their door she considered it their part to listen and learn.

It was a busy harvest-day when he called to take leave. All were out in the fields except Mrs. Smith; even Rose and Molly were gone to carry refreshments, the harvest cakes, and the great cans of cold tea and milk, which the thirsty men found refresh them without increasing heat. So the Rector was alone with Mrs. Smith.

'I came for my farewell to-day,' he said. Mrs. Smith made no answer. 'I feel deeply leaving all my people, but none more than this house, Mrs. Smith.'

'If ever house missed a step, sir, these doors will miss you!'

'There is a sadness and yet a comfort in being missed,' he replied. 'I have often wished I could have known more of your own mind, Mrs. Smith. I see you always at church, and all who need a friend feel you one, but you

have never said much to me on the thoughts of your mind.'

'I don't know, sir,' said Mrs. Smith; 'there be things, it seems to me, too great for words. There is seldom, if ever, a week over my head but what I open and read of our Saviour, how He stood by the bed, and took the fever hand, and bade the dying woman live; and I say to Him then, if ever man trod in His steps, and was blessed by Him to a like gift of healing body and soul, it was you, sir, that day when both were sinking in me. If I haven't troubled you with my poor words, I have spoke them out there, for the page is dim and blotted with tears, that if I didn't know the words I could scarce tell where they were.'

What more could be said? The minister gave her his blessing; and when he was gone she hid her face and wept at the departing sound of that step.

We must now make inquiry how Charley and Edith were getting on in their home.

'My dear children,' said Mrs. Collins, 'I cannot conceive why you keep up this desperate interest in that little lame boy, to the neglect, I am sure it must be, of your young friends well educated and rich.'

'Oh, mamma,' said Charley, 'if you only knew, you would see all those rich boys and girls don't want Edith and me. They have as many toys as we have, and it's all fuss with them; but little Me, mamma, do you know his poor mother says she really does think he would die if we were to forget him? You cannot think how he reads words of two syllables now! Sometimes I don't know a word, and he says, "Oh, master, I know!"'

'And, mamma,' said Edith, 'his poor mother says he is not like the same boy; she says he is as cheery as a bird in its nest on the tree. And when his poor father comes home tired from work he will sit by the hour to listen to Me; and the poor woman says he never goes to the ale-house, but brings her all his money, and everything mends, she says, since Charley began teaching little Me.'

And so it was. Life to little Me had been a dreary sitting still; all things passed him by and left him still lonely, but now the very letters of the alphabet had faces like friends; his book was his joy, ever growing more bright as he gathered fresh meaning from words put together. Charley reigned in his heart as the chief of friends in the whole world to him.

'Now, father,' he said, 'I can read to you out of the Book,—not my spelling-book, father, but the real holy Bible. Now, you listen and see.'

And the father came close and sat by his boy, and leaned his head towards him, for he was growing deaf, and the little lame boy read:—"Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." There, father, that was our Saviour.'

'Bless Him!' said the father: 'He was worse off than we.'

And so the easiest lessons for a little child were the most touching words that ever fell from human lips; the words of Him who made the world, and then died to redeem it.

Little Me, in his home, shone like a pale gleaming star, whose shining wins the eye heavenward, and we look up in

love. He had become a ministering child, indeed, in that once dreary home; no other voice there could read the Saviour's blessed Name. This ministering child had been taught by others,—by Charley and Edith, who had become his best friends. It is in this way light kindles light: you may obtain many a bright flame from one without lessening its own shining.

Charley and Edith still found it difficult to learn obedience to their parents, because it had never been required of them; they had been allowed to disobey, and did not, therefore, think it wrong. But by many a sweet lesson from Holy Scripture, and the voice of conscience within them, they learned, at length, that the question was not, whether their parents compelled their obedience, but what God required of them. God had bid them obey, and His word could not be broken. And when, by patient teaching, they began at length to know and believe the love that God had to them, and became familiar with the history of our blessed Lord in the Bible—that wondrous history that gathers hearts of every age and every class, winning and warning them by a love more than earthly, a love that transforms to its own Divine image; then they loved Him, and loving Him tried to obey: 'for this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE new Rector came, and grave faces received him; a feeling seemed abroad as if he had wronged them, and taken a place he had no right to fill. Instead of discouraging, this only cheered him on, for, though young in the sacred office, he had from his youth learned the hearts of his fellow-men, and he valued more deeply those who so clung to their old pastor that they could not at once welcome the new. And, truly, two books must be studied by all who would not make their ministry of the Gospel of Christ of none effect—the book that reveals the heart of God, and the book of human life, of which the mind of every man forms a page. Those who study only the first of these may be theologians, but they will not be ministers; those who study only the second may be philanthropists, but they cannot be pastors.

The minister who now entered on this charge was a man of very quiet manners, one whose silence was eloquent of sympathy, encouraging even the poorest to speak. In the free intercourse he held with all his people in their homes, he seemed to feel his office was to be a listener as well as a speaker; in this way he learned much that enabled him to speak with good effect. Yet, with this quiet manner, and the repose that rested on him, he had a sympathy that compassed the world. In his daily ministries to his own

people the heathen seemed never absent from his mind. In the quiet conversation of the day he would tell you of some one at the ends of the earth, on whom the true light had then shined, as naturally as if it had been of a cottage labourer next door; such a realizing power divine charity can impart, fulfilling even now our Saviour's own prayer, 'That they all may be one.'

The little list of village contributions to missions lay on his writing-table. It was not a large list, the names were but few, and, with the exception of the Hall, the sums very small. Why did it always lie on that table? Did it please him to see it, or did he have it there that he might pray for its enlargement?

When harvest was over he said, one day in a call which he made on Farmer and Mrs. Smith, 'I am very desirous that each family in this parish should have a treasury for God in their home. Surely we cannot rest in the peaceful light of heavenly truth ourselves if we be not trying to keep one little taper burning brightly in heathen darkness, to guide some poor lost wanderer into the pathway of life?'

Mr. and Mrs. Smith were silent. This was not encouraging, but the minister always concluded that silence led to consent, if it did not at once give it; and being impressed with the importance of the question, personally as well as relatively, he did not readily yield. So he said again, 'You know, Mr. Smith, what it is to drop a seed into the ground, and have it spring up and grow you know not how; you only know you put the seed there. How often, if we had this little treasury-box I spoke of, we might drop in a bit of money that we should never miss,

giving it in that small, secret way; and yet, what a harvest it would yield up one day, when there will be no more sowing of grain in the field, or precious seed in the souls of men! What do you say to this?’

‘ Well, sir, I consider it to be quite right as you say; but I think that treasury has been gathering here a long time, and giving out its store too.’

‘ Has it really? You cheer me, indeed! But I did not see your names in the very small Report sent up from this parish.’

‘ That may be, sir, for all things don’t get reported; and I should be for considering it full as well they should not. And I suppose you would not have come at the seed if you had not unlocked the granary door!’

All smiled at this, even Mrs. Smith, and the new minister never forgot what a vivid sunbeam could light up the face usually silent and grave; and he was greatly cheered at finding this response in a farm-house that had made no declaration before of its ready mind. He had now fairly aroused Farmer Smith into conversation, a thing that was not easily done.

‘ I can’t tell you of a box, sir, but I know there is a cupboard stands up in a corner-cupboard, and has stood there for years, growing rich, until a friend came in the spring inquiring, as you have done, and I believe it all went to the heathen you tell of. It is my wife farms that field, and you must make inquiry of her!’

‘ Mrs. Smith, I must come to you on behalf of this treasury.’

‘ Well, sir, it stands in the cupboard, and you can have what it gathers whenever you find it convenient; but I am

pretty sure there are other "droppers" now, beside the one my husband made count of !'

The minister longed to see the cup, even the outside of that treasury would be cheering to him ; but he waited until the right time came round for sending in the returns. Then he called at the farm, and said, ' Mrs. Smith, I am come for the cup !'

Farmer Smith was within, and he looked on with a keen, kindly eye. Mrs. Smith went to the cupboard and reached down the cup. The minister took it.

' Do you know how much there is here ? because you ought to know before I take it away.'

' I don't know, sir,' said Farmer Smith, ' that I ever yet counted the seed I planted for a harvest. ' Why, then, reckon this ?'

' Well, I will count it alone then. But, Mrs. Smith, may I have this one cup, which has so long gathered its store ? I would drink my tea out of it when alone. I could never feel disheartened when this cup called up remembrance.'

' Yes, sir, and welcome. You had best have a saucer, too.'

' But, Mrs. Smith, will another cup answer as well for the cupboard, and grow as rich as this one ?'

' You can best answer that, sir, I suppose, if we live until next year.'

So the minister took the cup, and often when he drank the cheering beverage he remembered with encouragement the stream of that love which had long and silently filled that same cup as a treasury for God.

But now an unexpected trouble saddened the cottage of

Jem. Poor Sharp had never held up his head cheerily since little Sue died. He had returned home with his master and been faithful to all; he had never refused food from any kind hand that offered it, though he would often turn away from his dish on the floor. He sometimes went out by himself, a thing he had never done, except that one day, when, hunger-pressed, he followed Olivia to Mrs. Brame's room. When he went out he did not return until the next day, and no one knew where he went. Jem felt anxious about him, lest he should be found frequenting the woods, and be shot. Michael called in one day from his more distant farm-service, and he was troubled to see the wasted look of the dog.

‘He seems so unsettled,’ Patience said; ‘yet he is fond of us all. The first thing he will do when he comes back from these tramps is to come straight up to me and lay his head in my lap, and if I say, “Sharp, where have you been?” he lifts up to me such a pitiful eye it is almost more than I know how to bear; and then he will go and lie down by his master, and seem more satisfied like in his ways for a time.’

Jem had tried to tempt him out, thinking he might cheer up if he got him more away, but the dog would not go; if Jem called him he would go up to him, lick his hand, and return. The only way in which he would walk was with the string leading his master, except those times when he went out alone.

‘I wonder where he goes?’ said Michael. ‘I have half a guess that I know.’

‘So have I, too,’ said Patience; ‘but I would not say.’

However, after this the dog did not leave for some

time, but Michael was so interested and anxious to know, that he took the churchyard path on his way to work and home again, and one morning, when the first frosty nights had set in, he saw poor Sharp stretched by the grave of little Sue, with his head laid at rest on its grassy sod, cold and dead. Many grieved for the dog, and not least the children of the Hall and the cottage; and the blind man wept as for a friend. So closed the useful, and, until the death of little Sue, the happy life of the faithful dog Sharp. The kind Farmer Burton felt the loss of the dog, and wishing to do something to cheer that little grave to the heart of the father, he raised a small white headstone, on which was written the name of little Sue, aged seven, and underneath, by her father's choice, the words, 'God shall send His angels.' And it greatly comforted Benjamin Tovel to have the sure word of promise written above the head of his sleeping child.

Alfred paid all the more attention to Benjamin Tovel now that he was bereft of his faithful dog. He often obtained leave to spend 'only just one hour' with him, and this hour always seemed a very short one. He was generally left at the cottage to pay his visit alone; in this way the personal acquaintance increased and the friendship grew strong. Sometimes he talked with Benjamin Tovel while he watched him at work; sometimes he sang with him. He took a lesson occasionally in making a little basket himself; it was to be for his mother, and kept a great secret, and only done with the finest willows, and each difficult twist was done by the elder hand. And often little Alfred climbed on the chair beside the chest of drawers, to reach down the Bible and read aloud to his

blind friend the chapters he most longed to hear. It was not easy to Alfred to pass by the stile without slipping off Snowberry to run in for a look, or waiting to hear if all were well with his friend. And little Alice made it her pleasure to lead him wherever he went. It is truly written, 'Loving favour is better than silver or gold;' for could wealth have solaced the blind man like a touching love, such as this?

The bereavements that come to childhood, except when orphaned, or in rare cases of strong attachment, are like the fading of a spring-flower, when others will follow; but in older life departing joys bloom not again until Heaven restores them. In both alike Divine Providence is seen: in the former endearing earth, our appointed sphere for a time; in the latter endearing heaven, as our entrance upon it draws near.

The favourite walk with Constance and Alfred was now to the wood, with its succession of charms, from the bright crimson fungi the children called 'Redcup Moss,' and found with delight on the dead wood in winter, to the first blossom of the new year and all that followed after. Then also they were not far from Mercy's home, and near to old Dolly and Nathaniel. Mrs. Cox never allowed Sally Millington to make any calls with the children without her, but they sometimes went alone with Sally to the wood. Little Maud at three years old was happy on her feet, and when tired Sally Millington was always ready to carry her.

As they started one day this autumn for a walk, the gamekeeper saw them pass by the lodge, and, looking out, said to Sally Millington, 'There is a storm lowering nigh; you must not go far.' The children, as usual, were

eager for the wood; and Sally Millington looking before her, and not behind, thought the blue sky quite safe. Mrs. Cox had charged her never to shelter under trees in a tempest; but Sally liked the wood, and saw no danger there. They had scarcely reached it when a storm burst overhead. A large oak-tree, still holding its thick green foliage, was near, and Sally hurried with the children beneath it to find shelter from the down-pour of rain. The thunder rolled overhead; and little Maud asked, 'Is God angry up in the sky?'

'No,' answered Sally Millington; 'it is only the black clouds clapping their big hands together, just like this;' and she clapped her hands to amuse little Maud.

'Why do they tap hands?' asked little Maud. 'I don't like it.'

'I don't know why,' said Sally Millington, 'unless they be glad that it rains: folks down here cannot tell what pleases those up there.'

'Yes, Sally, they can,' said Constance. 'I know a great many things that make glad up in heaven.'

'I suppose the Bible tells,' said Sally.

'Yes. I wonder you don't want to know, Sally.'

'I should not mind if I did,' answered Sally.

'Shall I ask mamma to let you come and read sometimes with us? then you would know,' said Constance.

'I don't know,' said Sally. 'I should be shamefaced with my lady.'

At this moment a terrible clap burst overhead; little Maud shuddered, and all felt afraid; still the tree kept the children dry, and Sally Millington stayed. She remembered the charge she had had, but she said to her-

self, 'I never knew such things happen as people hurt under a tree. I don't believe it, nor see why it should be!'

At this moment an active little old woman came on through the rain, her gown pinned over her black bonnet, just showing her small face between. Seeing Sally Millington and the children under the tree she stopped, saying, 'Why, woman, you be not safe there for one moment! Come out of the tree, and hie home with me.'

'We are dry here,' said Sally, 'and if we go out the children will get soaked with the rain.'

'Ye shan't bide there,' said the old woman, 'if I take a stick to ye all. The next stroke of the lightning may shiver ye dead! Out with ye, I say! a dash of rain is no damage, except to fine clothes, and what be that to the life of the children? There is my little old place outside of the wood, keep the path and run for it. Do ye hear what I say?'

Sally Millington looked at the distance, at the rain, and stood still.

'I'll be as good as my word,' said the old woman, still standing in the pitiless rain, and, with a strength that astonished and admonished Sally Millington, she broke down a stick of formidable size. 'I'll drive ye like sheep if ye won't go without: ye be worse silly than they; ye may have the babe dead in your arms with the next flash from the sky!' And, raising the stick, she hurried under the tree. Little Maud shrieked with terror, and Constance cried, 'Go, go, Sally! go!' Sally wrapped her gown over the child, and made a rush, with Constance and Alfred at her side, and the old woman after them. They soon saw a little place of four walls with thatch over it, the door was

quickly opened by the active old woman, and they were safe within. Then another peal crashed along the sky; the old woman went back a few steps in the rain. ' 'Twas mighty near,' she said; 'maybe shivered a tree.' Sally looked round from the door, and saw the old woman stand unmoved in the rain, with hands lifted to heaven. The lightning shaft had shivered the oak-tree, but the precious lives it had covered were in safety through her! Sally Millington, struck by the old woman's attitude, ran out and saw the blasted forest tree. Overpowered with thankfulness and terror, Sally sank on her knees, but no words could she say. 'There, come now, if ye be thankful ye will be a better woman: come in to the pretty babes, they be all of a cry. Come, come, little dears, ye be safe with old Peggy; and we must be thankful. Let us see how we can order to get you all dry.'

'Could you light up a little fire?' said Sally, in her distress.

'Now, ye see, girl, that's just what no mortal can do; the old chimney is so low it lets the foul weather in. I never can light a stick when the rain drives or the snow; but we must be thankful there's a roof overhead!'

'What shall I do?' said Sally, taking off the children's wet clothes.

'Here see, girl, here be two old rags of blankets, wrap the pretty dears up in them—they be clean as hands can make them; and here is my Sunday cloak for the boy.'

Sally took off little Maud's hat, pelisse, and boots, and wrapped her quite up in a blanket, and put her into the clean little bed. Then wrapping up Constance in the other

old blanket, and Alfred in the old woman's best thread-bare cloak, she hung the wet clothes up to dry. Sally could scarcely stand on her feet from terror and distress. Constance and Alfred were both old enough to understand that they had, perhaps, but just escaped death, as explained by old Peggy, and they trembled with the alarm of all that had passed. Old Peggy knelt down and rubbed little Alfred's feet through a scant bit of flannel she had in her drawer, and Sally, seeing this, did the same for Constance through the old blanket, until a glow crept up their shivering little frames, and the while she did so old Peggy said, 'We must be thankful.'

'Can you have a fire when it is very cold indeed?' at last asked little Alfred.

'Not when the rain drives, nor the snow neither,' answered old Peggy. 'Don't ye see it patters down all the soot? and the rain driving too, there be no chance for the flame if you set it alight. But we must be thankful!'

'What thankful for?' asked little Alfred, who did not quite see the connexion.

'Oh, my pretty dears! there was One better than we on whom the tempest did blow, and no shelter for He!'

'I know the little text about that,' said Constance.

'Speak it up, then,' said old Peggy; 'I love the sound of the dear words, though I couldn't read a letter—no, not if you would crown me!'

Constance, having gathered courage in her visits to old Dolly, said softly, "'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.'"

'Ah,' said old Peggy, with an evident feeling of relief,

‘He is far above all that. Then He did suffer for poor sinners like we! Sure we must be thankful!’

Wheels were heard driving quickly, and Sally looked out. It was Mr. Clifford. ‘How came you here?’ he said. ‘I have been everywhere for you. Where are the children?’ and he stood in the midst.

‘Papa! papa!’ shouted Alfred and Constance, ‘we were almost dead, but this good old woman saved us.’

Sally trembled as they spoke, but the children were unconscious that blame rested with her.

‘Dead!’ said Mr. Clifford: ‘where is Maud?’

‘There, papa; she must be asleep.’

Mr. Clifford took up the little bundle on the bed, it was the child asleep. ‘My good woman,’ he said, ‘let me take them as they are; their mother knows not they are safe: you shall have your wraps before night. But tell me, was there danger?’

‘We must be thankful,’ answered old Peggy; ‘the lightning bolt rift the tree, but we must be thankful they were fled.’

‘Were they under a tree?’ said Mr. Clifford, the terrible fear having struck his own mind before.

‘I will show you,’ said old Peggy, ‘and ye will be thankful to the good God, who held the blast in His hand until they were fled.’

‘Did you warn them away?’ asked Mr. Clifford.

‘Yes, yes,’ said old Peggy; ‘the poor things had no notion that danger was nigh, so I was forced to drive them out sharp: but that’s all over now.’

‘You have saved them!’ said Mr. Clifford. ‘I will get them home. Take the child,’ he said to Sally, as

he lifted Alfred and Constance one under each arm. But little Maud awakening, cried, on finding Sally's intention to carry her out. 'No, no! May not go!'

'Here, give me the pretty babe,' said old Peggy; 'she knows I *drive* her to shelter; she will go free with me.'

Little Maud went to old Peggy, nothing daunted by the memory of the great stick; but when they got to the door she clung round her neck, saying, 'Will they tap hands any more?'

'Bless ye, my darling!' said old Peggy, who did not understand the inquiry. 'Here's a fine carriage to ride in, and we must be thankful.'

The carriage was soon out of sight. Old Peggy went back to her cheerless abode to give humble thanks for the deliverance, then sat down contented and thankful.

On arriving at home the whole house was listening, and answered the loud hall-door bell. 'All safe!' said Mr. Clifford, as he handed them in, in their rags of old wrappers, but he looked deadly pale. Mrs. Cox had a warm fire and all appliances necessary for wet, shivering children. They were soon in their nursery, and their mother with them. There was no stopping the eager outpouring. 'They will not sleep until they have told us,' said Betty Cox. So, wrapped in warm flannels, they were allowed to tell, while little Maud already slumbered warm in her own nurse's lap. Unconscious of the blame that attached to Sally Millington, they told all that had passed. Sally Millington had hid away, and did not appear. Betty Cox's quiet brow flushed red, then her whole face turned white; their mother heard in silence, and, when the first outpouring was spent, they were soothed into sleep. She stayed with them until she

saw each exhausted child sleeping, then pressed the faithful nurse's hand, but spoke not a word, and left her to watch. The servants were waiting, in their strong feeling, near the nurseries, having heard from the coachman reports of the tree. Lady Gertrude said, as she passed them, 'We can only give thanks!' Then calling Mackenzie, she said to her, 'Will you see to Sally Millington? let her be taken care of, but tell her not to go to the nurseries until she has leave.' She then passed on in calmness, though under that shock.

In the afternoon the storm passed away, and the sun broke forth in splendour, every dewy surface reflecting its rays. The children were awake; having bread and milk instead of their lost dinner, to their great satisfaction, alone with Betty Cox by the nursery fire: but when they asked, 'Where is Sally?' Mrs. Cox replied, 'Sally has done very wrong, and must not come here to-day.'

'She did not know we should be killed,' said Constance; 'only the old woman knew, and Sally thought we should be wet: but we all ran so fast for fear of that great stick.'

'I would not have run,' said Alfred, 'only I thought we ought to do what the kind old woman said.'

'Cox,' said Constance, 'that good old woman's name is Peggy. I think that name is very pretty. And little Maud cried when Sally took her, but she went quite good to old Peggy.'

And so, in talk with their quiet and quieting nurse, the children were happy, and all took their food warm and well. Their grandmamma, too, had seen them, and was recovering the shock, assuring herself that each precious child was safe. Olivia, on whom she leaned in

a tender dependence, was with her ; and Mr. Clifford and Lady Gertrude were gone to the cottage. He wished her not to go, and said, ' You have passed through enough ; let me go to-day, and to-morrow I will take you.' But she answered, ' Let me go ; I cannot rest until I have seen their deliverer.' He did not show her the tree, and, not knowing where it stood, she knew not that they passed it. Arrived at the cottage, if four low brick walls can be worthy that name, they went in together.

' There now,' said old Peggy, ' did ye think I should be cold ? I could sleep huddled up without warmth for one night. But will ye be seated ? I fear my poor old chairs be no place for ye out of a downy carriage like that ; but we must be thankful.'

Lady Gertrude sat down unable to speak, ' her rapt soul sitting in her eyes ;' she longed to embrace her children's deliverer, but she sat there in silence.

' Tell me all ?' said Mr. Clifford.

The old woman gave a short, simple account of her getting them in, without any mention of the stick, which now stood by the fire, drying there, in readiness to compel her little kettle to boil.

' I am afraid you had trouble in getting the young woman in ?' Mr. Clifford said.

' Trouble !' said old Peggy. ' I never conjure up that ; if I can't order one way I just turn another : so I just *drive* them in. Right good earnest is best when danger bides nigh ; and we must be thankful.'

' Was that the stick ?' said Mr. Clifford, as he saw the fresh-broken wood ; ' had you strength to break that ?'

'Aye, aye ! said old Peggy, 'and use it too, if need be : the bigness scared them, you see, and the young woman ran, but a bit of a switch I might have had to lay on. And the pretty babe never feared me one winch the more : she came to me as free, her little arms hung about me, until I would have given the world to have taken her home : but we must be thankful.'

'You shall come and see them,' said Lady Gertrude, at length finding words, 'and it will be their delight to take care of you, and add every comfort they can to your home.'

'I don't want for nothing,' said the contented old Peggy ; 'only now I have seen them my old eyes will long, for they be those sweet babes whom Heaven made for our love. I have little grandchildren, and their prattle comes more cheery to me than any mirth of this world, let it be what it may. My son is good to me ; I never had parish pay, though I buried my good husband some twenty year gone : fifty year back I boiled my pot under this tree, that now drips on the thatch and rots it away ; I never counted he would do such mischief to me ; but he breaks off the wind and the drive of the snow, and we must be thankful.' It was evident that thankfulness was the chorus of life to old Peggy ; and uttered with the feeling into which her voice always deepened as she said it, it had a most touching pathos, destitute as she seemed of all the comforts of life.

'We have brought back the old wraps to cover up some new!' said Mr. Clifford, as he laid a large bundle on her little table, and they left old Peggy to unwrap new blankets in astonishment.

Lady Gertrude did not ask for the tree, she felt unable for more ; but as they passed it, standing scathed in the now glistening sunshine, a blackbird had perched on it, pouring forth his lay. She turned at the song, saw the blasted tree, spoke not, but sank on the supporting arm by her side.

Of all that passed after, our tale may not linger at this point to tell. It was long before Sally Millington was admitted to the nursery again. Lady Gertrude often had her with her ; and felt assured, at length, that her sorrow was deep and sincere. Sally Millington had now felt the need of a better spirit than her own, and when that need is felt the supply waits to meet it.

‘ I knew it would be so,’ said Mrs. Brame to Olivia. ‘ That ’s the way with my lady ; she always has with her that living water of truth, I mean the truth that is heavenly ; and if she can’t turn you to the right mind before, when once you can get no further she will draw it round you, and heap up those coals of fire that you told me meant love, until she melts down your hardness as soft as a child. I say she does it, but you know well I mean it is done by His Spirit, who works blessing through her. I have seen her compass that, aye countless times. I used in my hardness to say to myself, She shall never get the better of me, I who nursed her from her birth ! But she did, and I bless her every day that I live, aye almost every hour, and Him who gave her the power !’

But another tempest fell that no guardian could shield from—a tempest that bore death on its wings to poor sailors at sea. Ted the sailor-boy had been home again—man as he was, all still called him ‘ boy ;’ all welcomed his

coming as the bird to the home-tree, and when he left again a loss was felt around — as the sense of silent songs when birds of passage take wing. He was welcomed too at the Hall, and was one of Alfred's great friends. But the storm came at last; over his mother's soul it had long hung like a little cloud at sea, keeping still closer to her heart the son she was always giving up to Heaven.

The fatal tidings were first known by Joe. Ted's ship had gone down; a few hands had escaped in a boat, but his name was not amongst them. Joe hastened home the next day. Never before had a sad errand called him there. How to enter with the tale was more than he knew; he walked round the dear old place, hoping he might meet William; but instead of William he saw his father, who stood in silent surprise. 'Dear father,' he said, 'I am no welcome comer. I have heavy tidings with me.' Farmer Smith sat down on the handle of a plough, and said calmly, 'What is it, my son?'

'Ted's ship is gone down, and he is not amongst the saved!'

'God's will be done!' said Farmer Smith; 'and I do believe there is but one death for him, and that over now, he dwells with the blessed!' But having said this, Farmer Smith bowed his white head and wept. Joe stood by his side; at length the old man looked up, saying, 'Your poor mother? What! have you not seen her yet, Joe?'

'No, father.'

'You had better find her. You know she takes things best plain. You will happen of her within. I left her only now.'

Joe crossed the farm-yard, and went in at the back-

door : his mother heard the step, and a certainty fell with his footfall that it bore heavy news. She did not rise to meet him, but laid down her needle, and held out her hand as he entered, saying only ' My son !'

Joe sat down on the low chimney-stool at her side : it was Ted's favourite place, but he thought not of that. ' Mother,' he said, ' you heard the wind blow, and you know all I can tell.'

' I have long thought it,' she answered, calmly : ' so, then, it's over now ?'

' Well, mother, the sea could not drown the better life of our Ted !' At the sound of the dear name the mother wept.

Joe lingered at home, for tears were falling around. And at the Hall little Alfred first felt in his young heart a tempest at sea.

Before Joe had left home a letter arrived. It bore an inscription in the familiar hand, so often cheering all hearts before, of their lost sailor-boy, and both homes met to read it:—

' DEAR Father and Mother, and William and all,—I don't know well how to write: perhaps I had better try. We have a dead storm here at sea, the ship can't hold out long. She has borne up so bravely it will be vexing for those who may see her go down. I can scarce write with hard pumping, my hand shakes the pen. Don't you be thinking I am frightened; I am noways afraid of the rough arms of the old sea. 'Tis the best death for a sailor, and I shall sleep as sweet, mother, as in the grassy churchyard. Tell Will I have often thought on what he put to me

before I came out to sea ; and I am not afraid but what my spirit will rise up to the good God who loved it, and washed it from its sins in His precious blood. Don't you fret, mother ; the sea will give up its dead. I send a lock of my hair. There's a chance the boat may live. Our men are all calm. We have not had a scoffer among them. I have often read with them from my little Bible. There is no tempest in heaven, mother ; and you know it is written "There shall be no more sea." My last fond love to all. One kiss, my mother ! Till we meet again, think happy thoughts of your sailor-boy
TED.'

Who shall tell how often the letter was blotted with tears ; or pressed to the mother's lips, between which and her sailor-boy's kiss rolled the waves of the fathomless sea ! Oh, well was it once said : 'Our sorrows, while here, seem as if graven with a pen of iron and lead in the rock for ever ; but one wave of the ocean of Love which flows on that better shore will efface them all like the faintest impression on the sands.'

CHAPTER XXIX.

WE must now let three years pass over in silence, and then take a farewell glimpse of our Ministering Children.

The seasons had passed over Benjamin Tovel in happy repose. His days were no longer each one marked distinctly by toil, like the rising and falling tide of the labouring sea; but they glided swiftly and calm, like the clear rippling brook that flowed a few paces from Jem's cottage-door. The love and reverence that Jem and Patience felt for him, deepened as time advanced. The discipline of life, and the love of the Spirit, had purified and ennobled the character of Benjamin Tovel. The infirmities that often obscure Divine grace appeared already subdued and buried in him. His mind reflected the beauty of earth, and his heart was the home of all the charities of life. Who would refuse sorrow's pathway, when even here it can prepare the soul for that grace which enables it to reflect the Saviour's image so clear!

His work was now a gentle labour, on which no hard necessity hung; he often sang as he worked, and the touching tones of his song told of one whose harp had often been hung on the willows beside Affliction's deep waters, while he sat down and wept; but who had now left behind him the captivity in which Sorrow's chains can

bind us, and was beginning the triumph-song within sight of his Home.

Patience had the joy of another little son, and when Jem was asked by inquiring friends, 'What name have you chosen?' he made answer, 'I strike hard to have it called Benjamin.' And so the child was christened Benjamin, and was called 'Ben;' and he loved the nursing arms of the blind man better than his cradle. 'He wholly spoils me for work,' Benjamin Tovel would say; and Patience answered, with a smile, 'I know who wholly spoils him!' Benjamin Tovel was the children's delight; as we often see with children, they will take most to those whose gentleness has the depth and repose that past sorrow imparts. They were with him at all times, and he never wearied of them; they learned at his side, or on his knee, more in one happy year than the toil of many teachers can impart in far more. And, best of all, they seemed to drink into his spirit too; for obedience and love prevailed in that home: and when he missed them awhile, and did not know why, you might hear his voice calling 'Alice, my pretty one!' 'Willy,' or 'Ben,' for he never said 'little;' that term of dear remembrance slept silent and sweet in the grave of little Sue.

Sometimes, when he sat on the settle by the door, amidst the fragrant blossoms that clustered there, with Ben on his knee and a child on each side, Patience, working within, would hear him murmuring low, 'He setteth the solitary in families, and maketh him households like a flock of sheep.' When a beggar asked aid in passing by the cottage, he would always rise and go to the stile, and, sitting on it, would speak to the poor traveller on the way.

He would tell them of the door of mercy and love opened by Him who died on the cross for our sins, and then ascended above, that each poor lost wanderer might in Him find the way to pardon and heaven. He would tell them not to fear to venture, for beggars never yet were denied, if they came now, while the invitation was given by the heavenly King. When he found them ready to listen he would ask Patience for a handful of food, which she would bring out in full measure, and often a little milk when her store was not spent; and they sat on the bank, and the blind man would tell them some history from the Bible, in the same simple, winning way in which he told children; and sometimes getting warm with the theme, he took no note that other steps passing by had stopped on their way. Or sometimes, when he had done, Alfred would take hold of his hand, and he would say, 'Is it you, my young master? and I did not hear!' He always would have a few pence in his pocket, as he said, 'for his friends;' and Patience never let the little stock run out: but if ever the blind passed he would ask them to rest, and the small coin given then was sure to be silver. And he would ask the name of the dog that led them; and whether they had a child? and give them his blessing when they went on their way. He was a rich man now, in every sense of the word—rich in heavenly and earthly treasure. Farmer Burton would never receive the excuse that the last quarter's money was not spent when he brought another. He would say, 'Poor man! look what his sorrows have been; let us keep what cheer we can round him in his life's quiet evening.'

He looked much older than he was, for he was yet far from

sixty, though his hair was turning white and all called him old; but by reason of this his age seemed to stand still, and a long ripened autumn glowed round Benjamin Tovel.

On Sunday little Alice always led him to church, and the village people left a sheltered place for him. All would turn a kindly look when they saw him come, led in by the child. Alfred never felt quite at rest in his place until he had made sure that the blind man was present, though he was never absent, and often first of all. To Olivia he was the one link that bound her childhood in the town to her youth at the Hall; she could distinguish the deep tones of his voice when it rose in the psalm or the hymn, which, when sung a few times, he would remember and join in; and her own voice rose freer and happier for blending with his,—the only friend of her childhood now left her on earth, except little Rachel in the workhouse. And now we must take farewell of Jem's happy cottage, and make a visit of retrospective inquiry to the workhouse of the town.

The workhouse which Rachel had entered was the same to which Patience was sent when a child, but the people who held office there were no longer the same. Rachel attended the workhouse school, and being a quick, attentive child, obedient and obliging in her ways, she generally kept out of trouble. There were but few young women in the house, the inmates were chiefly old people and children. In consequence of this, Rachel sometimes went into the laundry to work, and very often waited on the old and bedridden women. This last work of nursing was familiar to her; it reminded her of her home and her dear mother. She did everything so kindly and patiently, that

the poor old people welcomed her amongst them ; and those out of bed and those able to sit about the large room had her continually in call, doing or undoing something for them. It was soon seen that Rachel was a favourite wherever her work might be : this called forth some envy and ill-will. Poor little Rachel did not always remember that the only safe place, in trouble or out of it, is keeping near to the Saviour. Sometimes she indulged pride at doing things well ; sometimes she felt sullen because she was not commended ; at other times she did wrong, or forgot or neglected orders, and then made excuses instead of owning her fault : but, sooner or later, the holy lessons she had learned from her infancy came back on her heart ; she confessed her fault, grew more humble, prayed more earnestly, and was happy again.

There was in the workhouse an old woman, who had been there ten years : her name was Grubb. She was a widow, and went by the familiar name of Goody Grubb. She had lost her children in their youth ; her husband had died also in consumption, and not being able to provide for herself she had taken refuge in the workhouse. She had herself been weakly when young, but as age advanced she had grown stronger, and was now one of the strongest of the old women there. One trial of the workhouse is, that you must bear with all the variety of tempers, dispositions and characters, gathered around you in the same room. This variety is perhaps interesting to a visitor, but often the sorest trial to those who live there. Goody Grubb always considered it her calling in life to set other people to rights. She spent her days in giving good advice, unasked, undesired, and seldom followed. But it

did not appear to strike her that her advice was unwelcome, and therefore might be better suspended for a time. Her shrill voice would be constantly heard pointing out people's faults, and what she thought the right way to mend them. Sometimes the old people got up a gossiping hubbub to drown it, but as in the pauses it always began again, like the dreary whistle of the wind in the chimney when the household hearth is still, a confusion of tongues generally prevailed, and the old people were often called to order by the interference of the matron. On these occasions Goody Grubb always put on an air of triumph, as though the matron had come in solely to support her ; quite unconscious that her well-meant, ill-timed advice, was the provoking cause of the disorder that prevailed.

The sorrow of this was made greater because Goody Grubb really valued her Bible, and wished to do and to say the thing that was right. But pride reigned in her heart, and she always took it for granted that she was herself in the right, and all who opposed her in the wrong. She would sit for hours with her Bible before her, stiff and stern, as if braced up to give way to no one. She would at any moment have read aloud to them all, and given her own interpretation to the words that she read, but this no one would allow ; and as to looking around her for any little kindly office she could do for those older or more feeble, this never appeared to present itself to her mind. It was difficult to know how she could read much to herself in the unhappy atmosphere of that one great room, where, by sorrowful necessity, the old women were crowded together, with no young life to soften and brighten the wintry barrenness of helpless and ignorant age.

When first little Rachel saw Goody Grubb sitting upright before her large Bible, the sight of the open Bible quite affected the child : it reminded her of her mother. The old woman's keen eye noticed this ; she felt pleased with the child, and talked with her, and gave her good advice. This made Rachel think much of her, and wish to please her. But very soon Goody Grubb began to warn her against having anything to do, more than she could help, with the other old people, telling her they were hardened old souls, and not fit associates for her. And when Rachel was doing any little voluntary service for them Goody Grubb would call her off to something else, with a voice of authority. She thought it was for the child's good, but the other old women were hurt, and contention broke out again. Poor little Rachel soon found herself in a great difficulty ; it was plain she must disobey Goody Grubb, who read her Bible and gave good advice, or she must give up being kind to all the other old people. How she wished she could know what her own mother would have told her to do ! There was no voice to speak to the little workhouse girl ; but she remembered her mother always told every trouble to the Saviour, that ever-present Friend, and then the thing always came right in the end : so she prayed in the words of the psalm, as her mother had taught her : ' Teach me, O Lord, to do the thing that pleaseth Thee, for Thou art my God. Show me the way wherein I should walk, for I lift up my soul unto Thee.' Then she thought she would begin the New Testament, reading as many verses as she could slowly and thoughtfully every day, until she should come to one that would guide her in the way. When, after some days, she

reached the end of the 5th chapter, her eyes brightened as she read, 'I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you.' 'Then I must be good to them all,' thought little Rachel; 'the Saviour says so: and I cannot be good unless I am kind, because I am only a poor child, and so I must try to help them. Goody Grubb could teach them the Bible and religion if they would let her, but I can only wait on them.' Not only wait on them; look again, little Rachel. Rachel did look again and read, 'Pray for them.' 'I will try,' said little Rachel to herself, 'and then perhaps Goody Grubb will grow kinder, and they will mind what she says, and we shall be happy.'

When Rachel tried to pray for others she found it easier and happier work than when she had prayed only for herself, and she felt more ready to wait on all around. The next time she was sent up to the old women, most of them looked dismal or cross for the want of a little interest in their unvarying existence. One poor old woman in her restlessness had got her bed-clothes in confusion; Rachel put them straight, and shook up the pillow, and the old woman went off to sleep. Another, who knitted in bed, had let her ball roll away, and it had tangled itself round the feet of two old women, who were tottering along in different directions. Rachel rescued the old women and the ball, and the poor woman in bed was rejoiced to find her worsted not broken. Another said her poor foot was so cold it had no feeling in it. Little Rachel had often rubbed her mother's, and began to try her best for the poor cold foot. Goody Grubb looked at the ministering child, and felt that she was dear to the old women; a bad feeling

rose in her heart, and she was tempted to call her away : but Goody Grubb was a Christian, though heavenly love in her soul was overgrown with earthy pride; so she thought better of her purpose, and left Rachel to follow her own pleasant way, the way she had been learning from the Bible. Things went on better than usual that day, and the matron said, 'What have you done to keep the old folks so quiet?' Rachel said nothing, but she thought to herself, 'I have only done what the Saviour said—tried to be good to them, and prayed that they might be kind.'

The next time that Rachel was sent up she took with her a little book that had been given her; it was a very touching little history. She went to the bedside of the poor, restless old woman, and began to interest her with it. The old woman was not deaf, so she read in a low voice. 'Read up there! we can't hear,' said an old woman by the fire. Rachel looked at Goody Grubb, who took no notice. 'Read up, child!' said another old woman; so Rachel read louder. The little history was much approved. 'Don't 'stry the book, child,' said one old woman, 'I will hear it again some day.' But Goody Grubb said, 'It could not be to profit if those liked it who would not hear the Bible.'

Another day, when Rachel was amongst the old women, they asked her to find another story for them. Rachel had not got another, but she said she knew where to find beautiful stories in the Bible. Some would not consent to the Bible, but others approved, and finally Rachel found there would be worse trouble if she did not begin, so she read the history of Joseph. At first there was some interruption, but the thrilling tale won its own way, and they all listened.

Goody Grubb said nothing, but though it was the Bible she did not look pleased, because she knew they would not listen to her.

Rachel in this quiet way made herself very useful, and could keep the old people happier than any one else : it was by forgetting herself and thinking of them, it was by following in the way the Saviour's words taught her, and asking His help and blessing. The third winter she was in the workhouse she was thought old enough for a place of service, and would have been sent to one, with the Lady Gertrude's approval, but the winter was severe and many of the old people fell ill. Rachel was so great a favourite and help with them, that the matron wished to keep her. Lady Gertrude, and Olivia, and Benjamin Tovel, and her friend in Ivy Lane, were all pleased at such a reason for her staying a little longer in the workhouse. They had all remembered her with kindness; Olivia went every few months to see her; and sometimes Rachel went to see the poor woman in Ivy Lane for a day, where many were kind to her.

Goody Grubb was at length taken ill with rheumatic fever. She was very impatient and restless under the pain; it was difficult, and sometimes impossible, to do anything to please her; but Rachel had had a long training in patience: she would try a second time as kindly as the first, and sometimes sat quite still by the bed when she could do nothing else. One day, when the poor old woman was tossing and groaning, Rachel said, 'I wish I could do anything to make you better!'

'You can't, child; you know that; there is none but God can, and it don't seem as if He would. I have been

the only one reading the Bible, and yet there is not one who suffers like me !'

Rachel well remembered the text that so often comforted her mother, and said, in a low voice, 'Is not that text for you, "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth?"'

The words fell like balm on the soul of the poor troubled woman. The pride that had grown up and hid her own sinfulness from her sight had also hid the Saviour ; but the voice of the child, applying the well-remembered words to her, came like a whisper of love from above, and she said, 'Read me that chapter.'

'Where is it ?' asked Rachel.

'The 12th chapter of Hebrews,' said Goody Grubb. Rachel found it and read ; and as she read the silence increased, and many listened to the words speaking peace by Jesus Christ. From that day Goody Grubb became more patient and easy to please, and she still rested on that one word, 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth !' She often asked Rachel now to read to her, but she always took that verse for her pillow of rest. And now, as the warmth of the heavenly words glowed on her soul, she felt how cold her own heart had been. Now that she was humbled in spirit, she began to see things in the light of Truth, not the false light of Pride: she lay quiet in her little bed, and thought on these things. The more she looked back on the past, the more she felt that she had hardened her heart in its pride against all. There is nothing that separates us so far from God or from man as our pride. Goody Grubb felt this now ; there was not a creature who cared for her except little Rachel: indeed she felt sure that all the old women were glad she was out of their way in

her bed, and would feel it a good riddance if she were to die. There was a desolate feeling in this; but this was not the worst: poor Goody Grubb's own heart felt dark, no light from heaven came shining in comfort. She could no longer find any self-satisfaction, and all other comfort seemed dead; for it is written, 'God beholdeth the proud afar off,' too far for them to see Him, or feel the joy of His salvation. Only that one little text, that Rachel had said, was as a leaf from the Tree of Life to Goody Grubb, it kept her from sinking. At length her burdened mind felt compelled to speak, to raise, if only a little, the weight that lay heavy. 'Rachel,' she said, 'those old women always listen when you read the Bible to me, but they never would hear from me so much as a word.' Rachel did not know what to say. 'Tell me, child, if you know their meaning in it; if ever they said a word to you about it, I charge you to tell me.' Rachel was close to the little bed, and she answered, not without fear, 'They did say one day, "It is all very well, child, for you to read up for our pleasure, but we won't have that old Goody drive us on with her crook: we have made up our minds we'll have nothing from her!"'

'Child,' said Goody Grubb, 'I wish I never might leave this sick bed. I don't know how to sit amongst them all. I know they all hate me, and I do the wrong thing when I only mean the right.'

Rachel was greatly surprised and affected to hear Goody Grubb speak like this. She thought she had been quite above all things, except giving good advice and reproof. She had sometimes wondered whether to sit upright, and look through spectacles and find fault,

was what all good people would come to at last; and she had felt a great respect for Goody Grubb.

‘Oh, don’t die!’ said little Rachel. ‘I love you, indeed; and think that they would, if you could forgive them, and ——’

‘What, child?’

Poor little Rachel did not know what to say, but, full of fear, she added, ‘be kind.’

The words of the Bible were familiar to Goody Grubb, and that little sentence, ‘and be kind,’ reminded her of the injunction, ‘Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.’ This looked so unlike all her life had been, that Goody Grubb forgot the sins of others in the sense of her own; while the last words, ‘as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you,’ brought to her spirit the balm of forgiveness.

Goody Grubb did recover, and had to leave her little bed and sit up in the room. No one welcomed her back; only little Rachel was glad, and made her seat comfortable with a pillow behind, and put her great Bible before her, as it always used to be. At the sight of the Bible Goody Grubb wept.

‘She be grown wholly childish!’ one old woman said to another.

‘Nought so good,’ answered the other; ‘her be only weak; her will be preaching again in no time, you’ll see!’

Rachel looked greatly distressed. Goody Grubb had heard all. Oh, the effort it is to humble ourselves when we have walked in pride before others! but Goody Grubb felt it must be now or never; so she said,—

‘ ’Tis I want to be preached to ; I am just the chief of sinners. I can see and feel it now, for all my pride is laid low. You don’t want to fear my reading again ; I can’t see the blessed words of the Book, for I have cried night and day over the hard words I have said, and the hard heart I have had, till my eyes are that dim I shall never read again. I can only pray God in His mercy to find me a corner to creep in, and to wash us all in His blood, that we may rest in heaven.’

The old women all listened, and one or two who couldn’t hear leaned over to others, and said, ‘ What be her saying ? ’ More than one wiped away a tear, and one whom the others called ‘ Old Spirity,’ and who had been the first in opposing Goody Grubb, said, ‘ There, there ! don’t ye take ðn ! ye are just a bit weak, but your eyes are good enough still, and will soon be peering again ; and if ye don’t preach, ye shall read up now and then ! ’

But Goody Grubb was quite right ; her eyesight had failed ; it was no use to rub her glasses, and try them both ways : the words looked in confusion, and she had to shut the Book up again. Oh, how she longed for those blessed words now, like waters in a desert soil, but longed to see them in vain ! And as she sat meekly there, with the large Bible shut beside her, doing nothing, saying nothing, only sometimes letting fall a quiet tear, the old women would stop in their gossiping talk, and look kindly at her, and say, ‘ There ! wouldn’t we listen if you could read a bit ? and don’t ye hear, we haven’t spoken one bad word to-day ? ’ Or they would say, ‘ Don’t ye fret ; when the child comes she shall read up a bit ; it will comfort you up, and do us all good, maybe.’

Rachel was to go out to service in the spring ; it vexed all the old people, but troubled no heart so greatly as that of poor Goody Grubb. Rachel was the only comfort she had on earth, and what could she do without the ministering child ? But there is a verse that says, ' He hath torn, and He will heal ; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up.' A letter came to the workhouse master, inquiring for one Alethia Grubb, a widow, without children living, or any near relations. A little property had fallen in, and she was, if still living, the heir. Goody Grubb well remembered her relation, and the little home he had made, into possession of which she had now come. Her first request was to take Rachel with her, promising to be to her as a mother. Rachel was delighted at her aged friend's fortune, and happy to go with her. All her kind friends approved, and the arrangement was made. But before they left, Goody Grubb said to the matron, ' I should like to give the old folks a tea-drinking.' The matron was pleased, and said, ' If Mrs. Grubb liked to pay for the material, she would make them plum-cake.' So they all drank tea, the last evening together ; and Mrs. Grubb shook hands with them all the next morning, and they parted good friends, with kind wishes to speed her on her new way ; and she set out with Rachel in the coach. It was strange to her, after her long workhouse life, to be at large in the world, and feel herself rich ; and before night they reached the pretty little house, with a knocker on the door, and a little green in front, with palings and a gate. And Widow Grubb and Rachel both found a home.

CHAPTER XXX.

CHARLEY and Edith had never grown weary in their care for little Me and his home. The rill of heavenly charity that flowed through their young hearts had its rise in the eternal hills, therefore it flowed freshly with ever new supplies, and deepened its channel and widened its bed: for Charley and Edith, both in heart and mind, had a freer expansion and power than children whose central point is Self. If we grow weary in labours of love, it is because we are carrying them on with our natural powers alone, not supplied from that better life whose measure is infinite. That better life, even on earth, has no meridian from which it declines; its day is eternal, and brightens for ever.

Charley's delight was to teach Me a little of all he knew himself, and the crippled boy made rapid progress, learning being the sole occupation of his time; while the exercise of teaching to Me all he learned himself not only gave Charley a steadiness of purpose, but doubly impressed his acquirements upon his own mind. Me kept even pace with Charley in arithmetic, and showed a great taste for drawing. He learned to write a good hand; in short, it was evident he would follow his young teacher wherever he led him in the pursuit of useful knowledge. But far better still was Me's love for his Bible; no other entice-

ments of books ever led him to neglect that best companion and friend. And when the winter evenings drew in, his father sat by the fire close to Me's chair, which was now a bigger chair than before, for the cripple had grown; the mother took her work, and Me read from the Bible. Who that looked in on them could have supposed them the same who, a few years before, knew no comfort in home? One evening Me said to his father,—

‘ Now, father, you might learn to read. There is my very first book, as good almost as new. I really will teach you.’

‘ How you talk, child !’ said the father.

‘ But, father, you must learn; and mother, too.’

‘ There, now !’ said the mother. ‘ I know my letters already. I don’t know who wouldn’t, so often as I have heard them discoursed with.’

‘ See, father, there’s mother knows hers already ! Just hand me my books . . . No, wheel me up to them. Now, father, come : “ A, B, C ; ” say that after me.’

‘ There !’ said the father, when the first lesson was ended, ‘ I never thought to know a letter, and I can tell over seven ! I shall hold my head high !’

‘ Not for that, father,’ said Me ; ‘ you won’t think such great things of knowledge when you come to know more. But only think, father, what a blessing when we all sit round and read ! Meggie is getting on so fast with our young lady !’

And so they grew in knowledge, not of the wisdom of this world, but of that better knowledge that maketh wise the simple. Taught by the Divine Spirit who enlightens the soul, they learned to know and believe the love God

had to them, and to rejoice more in that love 'than one that findeth great spoil.'

Charley and Edith had now entered on their last year of home lessons. Charley had for some time received instruction from a tutor for a few hours in the day, but he never liked to prepare any lesson without his faithful governess and friend. After this year he was to enter life at a public school; and Edith was to be sent to learn accomplishments with girls of her own age, and more of the style of life than Mrs. Collins feared would be learned with her excellent governess at home; though at the same time Mrs. Collins did not fail to express her value for Miss Mansfield, and her sense of the success of her educational engagement. But to Jane the happy issue in Charley and Edith was the sweetest recompense earth could bestow.

A brother of Mrs. Collins' returned this year from abroad, and came on a visit to his sister's family. He was a man of much benevolence and intelligence, and had been in a large way of business abroad. Hearing often of 'Me,' he one day asked his sister,—


'Who is this "Me" the children talk so much of?'

'A poor crippled lad,' replied Mrs. Collins: 'the children have taken a desperate fancy to him; there is not one of their rich friends they think half so much of.'

'Where is he?' asked Mr. Mildney.

'He lives some distance off, on the Common: it keeps the children in exercise, and shows a good disposition; so I have not put a stop to the intercourse.'

'I should think it has had a happy influence,' said Mr. Mildney. 'I am charmed with the pleasant ways of the children, always thoughtful for others.'



'They have a first-rate governess,' replied Mrs. Collins; 'a woman who thoroughly understands her work. I have not had a complaint since she entered the house: before she came I was worried out of my life with women who could not rule the children. I leave things to her, and this fancy for the lame boy began, I think, with her.'

When Charley and Edith came in, about to start for their walk, Mr. Mildney said,—

'If you are going to see your poor crippled friend Me, I should like to go with you.'

'Oh, uncle, will you really go?' asked Edith.

'Yes! yes!' shouted Charley. 'Come, uncle! come!'

Miss Mansfield wished to retire from the party, thinking the uncle and children should make their visit alone; but she was compelled to go by all voices at once. Even Mrs. Collins said, 'I am sure you ought to go, Miss Mansfield, for the credit is yours.' So they started, the children on each side of their uncle, talking both at once, giving him the history of all things that bore remotely or nearly on the life of Me. The benevolent uncle was both surprised and delighted, not having expected to find this stir of active love in his relative's home. With a child holding each hand he walked steadily on, unable to show Miss Mansfield the courtesy of more than a word; but she, in quiet happiness, walked on by their side. The visit was as interesting, prosperous and joyous, as could be expected. Mr. Mildney was surprised at the lad's proficiency: he was some years older than Charley, but small and delicate from his injury and close confinement.

On their homeward walk Mr. Mildney proposed a plan to Charley and Edith. He offered to provide the means

for building, in the approaching spring, a room to be attached to the cottage, in which Me might gather a little school, teaching the children of the straggling cottages on the Common, to whom no instruction was given. The generous uncle would provide the cost if Charley undertook to watch over the work ; and if he and Edith would lay by their weekly allowance to provide the necessary school materials when the building was finished. In this way Me would be provided with a maintenance for life, and grow up, they might reasonably hope, into the most useful member of society on the whole extent of the heath. Who shall describe the shouts, the leaps, that Charley gave ; or the very dance for joy of Edith's happy step ! Charley's cap tossed high with a ' hurrah ' that almost rang back again to Me within his cottage-door ; and went quite through the benevolent heart of his uncle, whose eyes suffused with tears of truest charity, at finding how the music of its words thrilled responsively the very frames of the children at his side. How sweet to Jane Mansfield looked her patient toil, in which no parental heart had shared her hopes or fears, her difficulties and disappointments ! This, at least, had had in this instance the advantage, that it left her influence undivided, and stronger, because it gathered all its aid from a source invisible but infinite. She felt, as she heard those shouts of joy, as if they would echo in her soul for evermore. This was Charley's first great realised achievement, to have helped a helpless boy on to a point of honourable independence. Would classic laurels or a merchant-prince's crown of wealth, ever make his spirit vibrate with a keener, purer joy ? This, his earliest triumph, was not for himself, it was life-long success accomplished for another ; and

might it not be well believed, that he who won and wore the joy of a first triumph for another, would redeem the happy pledge, and win and wear no self-absorbing trophies in the race of life?

On reaching the house Miss Mansfield retired to her room. Charley, cap in hand, rushed into the drawing-room, followed by Edith; while Mr. Mildney, in his calmness, brought up the rear.

‘Oh, mamma!’ shouted Charley, at his mother’s sofa.

‘Oh, mamma!’ exclaimed Edith, ‘what do you think?’

‘My dear children, you distract me! I cannot have this uproar. I thought you had been learning better manners of late; and before your uncle, too!’

‘I am very sorry, mamma,’ said Charley, drawing up a chair, and sitting down quietly, ‘I did quite forget just to-day.’

‘Could you listen, mamma, if I tell you quite quietly?’ and Edith smoothed down her haste as well as she could, saying, ‘May we tell you, mamma?’

‘No; I cannot have you go into such extravagances. Go, Edith, and take your things off. I cannot hear anything in an uproar.’

The children retired, the rapture was over — unintentionally extinguished. But they found their own governess, whose spirit glowed in the same joy, and she soon re-kindled theirs in a quieter gladness.

‘We used to have these outbreaks when Miss Mansfield first came,’ said Mrs. Collins. ‘I could not understand it, having never seen anything like it before; but of late the children had acquired a more correct behaviour: only very likely this crippled boy has drawn a horse with

four legs, or proved a sum in addition, or something else as remarkable. I always know they have been there when they lose self-possession.'

Mr. Mildney looked grave; he was standing up by the fire, but made no reply. He thought it not the time to speak, when the maternal censure had been passed; but he could well understand how the poor crippled boy had been the one loadstone to draw out their young sympathies, which, otherwise objectless and barren, would have wasted away. And he knew the value of this generous gush of feeling expended on the poor boy, whose only visible return was the love of his heart and the progress he made.

In the evening the children came down quieted, with their usual considerate and pleasant behaviour. No further request was made by them to tell their happy tale, for fear of distressing their mother; but in the evening Charley went close to his father, and said,—

'I want very much to tell you something, papa.'

Mr. Collins listened patiently, and approved, only saying,—

'I hope, Charley, when the time comes you will care as much to make your own fortune as you now do this poor lad's.'

'The care for another's welfare is the best preparation for the true pursuit of his own,' said the benevolent uncle.

'I am sure, brother, I wonder you ever made a fortune with your views of social duties,' said Mr. Collins.

Mr. Mildney smiled, saying,—

'It is a quiet fact that I have; and I never feared that my larger vessel would be more likely to founder because now and then it took a little boat in tow, until it had rigged enough canvas for sail.'

Edith, encouraged by Charley's success, made a very gentle attempt with her mamma, and succeeded in imparting the fact : as to the joy of the fact, it may be a question how much penetrated with it.

'Where is Master Charley?' inquired Mrs. Collins the next morning at breakfast.

'I don't know,' said the servant. 'He went out early into the garden : he often does that.'

'Edith, where is your brother?'

'I don't know, mamma.'

'Miss Mansfield, where can Charley be? I have allowed him to breakfast with us while his uncle is here, and now he is not ready.'

'I am very sorry,' said Miss Mansfield. 'I have not the least idea where he is.'

'Master Charley is here,' said the servant, opening the door.

Charley entered in perfect breakfast order. The party had only then assembled, so that he could hardly be called late, but his glowing cheeks and shortened breath told of some haste.

'Where have you been, Charley?' inquired Mrs. Collins.

'I just ran up to the Common, mamma, to tell Me about the school-room. You cannot think how glad he was. His mother had not been able to dress him, so he was lying in bed ; and he threw his arms round my neck and cried. I said, "Why do you cry, Me? I am sure you can do it, and be the best master anywhere round." And what do you think he said, uncle?'

'That he was crying for joy, I dare say.'

‘Yes, uncle; how easily you guessed! He said he was crying for joy, because he could now see a way how to support his poor father and mother when they were grown old, instead of lying a helpless burden upon them; he said, “I shall be the happiest man that lives, next to you, Master Charley.” He always puts me at the top of the tree.’

‘Take care you don’t get a fall then, Charley,’ said his father.

‘Oh, papa, if I did it would be into poor Me’s arms! They would be stretched out, I am sure, let him run what risk he might!’

Mr. Mildney saw the work in safe hands before he left. Its progress was delightful to the children. At length all was finished—a day of great rejoicing; Charley and Edith had saved up their money, not asking any help. At breakfast, on the day of completion, Charley said,—

‘My plate stands uneven. Dear me! here’s a note under it!’ Edith took up her plate.

‘And here is one for me!’ she said.

They broke the seals, and each little packet held a five-pound note, with an inscription on the paper, ‘To help in fitting up the new school-room, with love from papa and mamma.’ The children gave very gentle, but very heartfelt expression, to their joy and surprise.

A day was fixed to celebrate the event. Charley wrote to his uncle, now resident in England, to be quite sure and come on that day. The school-room was decorated with wreaths of flowers, and the children of the neighbourhood invited, that they might see the new room, and the master ready and able to teach them. Mr. Mildney, when he arrived, provided Me with a new suit of clothes, making

the poor lad, with his intelligent face, an object of still greater admiration to his father and mother; and this new clothing made him more highly thought of as a schoolmaster.

‘ Now Fenty, dear Fenty, do make us good things for our feast on the Common!’ And Mrs. Fentyman set all her kitchen to work, and went up herself, and as many of the servants as could go; and Mr. and Mrs. Collins were both present at tea. The evening was delightful; and Me started in life as a schoolmaster to the little children around.

Soon after this Miss Mansfield left her pupils for their fresh start in life. Charley went to a public school, to throw his early awakened energies into the pursuits awaiting him there; and Edith to her school. But Miss Mansfield and her pupils continued warm friends. Me was still an unbroken interest, awaking freshly on each return home; and Mr. Mildney became as a second father to Edith and Charley.

Jane Mansfield returned to her home, and enjoyed the lengthened intercourse with all her family and personal friends. Her second sister was happily engaged in the work of instruction, and the third was in full usefulness at home. Jane was thinking of re-entering on the responsible and all-important work, when she one morning received a note in a business hand not known to her. She said, playfully, before opening: ‘ Perhaps this may be an offer of an engagement, that may save me the anxiety of inquiry.’ Then blushed on reading it, and folded it up. Alone with her mother, she opened it again. It was one of Samson Smith’s unexpressive notes, stating, in few words,

that he had received an offer of partnership from his uncle, which would enable him to marry with every prospect of a sufficient income, and asking the gift of her hand. Mrs. Mansfield looked in silence at her daughter. 'Impossible!' said Jane. 'I could not give up all to coolness like that!' Yet it cost her a painful effort, for she had always felt the weight and the worth of his character. Her mother was silent, her father regretted, but Jane wrote a denial.

On the second evening after a note was brought to her; she was surprised at seeing the same writing on an unposted letter. She opened, and read:—

'DEAR MISS MANSFIELD,—On receiving your letter I suspended my acceptance of my uncle's offer, and left London immediately. I am at the inn where the coaches put up. I ask you to allow me an interview with you. If you refuse me this, I shall leave all my home prospects immediately, and go off to the wild life of the Australian bush. All my earthly hopes have long centred in you: with this hope I have toiled, and at length have succeeded in reaching a monied independence, which, apart from you, has no value for me. I only ask you to grant me an interview.

'Yours faithfully,

'SAMSON SMITH.'

This request was granted. It ended in a promise that Jane would the next day enter on a visit to the farm, while Samson went on to prepare the way for her. His heart had at length been stirred to its depths, aroused, and called forth. This changed the surface: the silent soul

found expression. Emotions that had long worn their deep channels within now enriched the outer life, and gave to the countenance and manner a kindling expression ; all seemed to see him transformed ; his mother's heart was content, the true life of her son was manifest now. It was no change from without, the effect of a passing position, as may too often be seen ; this was an unfolding from within of that which had long been gathering there—the hidden wealth of one lonely heart, which had at length found the fellowship which could draw it out. All rejoiced in the hope, and Jane was betrothed.

Samson would yield to no lengthened delay ; he said he could do nothing without her : could not choose a home, nor chair nor table to put in it ; could make no household arrangements, until Jane was his bride. So the weeks were but few when from one of the old churches of that pleasant town the wedding-bells rang, and Jane left all the dear haunts of her childhood to live in London, and there prove the ever-increasing influence of a life rich in faith, hope, and charity.

Farmer and Mrs. Smith had now seen two of their sons married, with every prospect of comfort ; and they soon after this welcomed the intelligence from Joe of his prospect of being received as a son in Mr. Butterworth's family. The second daughter, Jessie, was his affianced bride ; and Joe assured his parents that Jessie had a greater longing to visit the old farm-home than to explore any countries abroad.

And yet, once more before we close our tale, we must tell of the sound of glad marriage-bells borne on the summer breeze, not from the old town, but from the

village, where we have grown familiar with hall, and farm, and cottage life. Far over the woods rang those glad marriage-bells, bringing William and Mercy in their best array to the church, while Sukey once more stayed at home—Sukey's wedding-day, though nearer by three years, not having yet come; so she stayed at home for *mediation*, as she said. It was rather supposed that she meant meditation, but *mediation* had its place in her service that day, for a little rosy boy was at play on the floor, and an infant girl in the cradle, who sometimes raised a cry; but Sukey assured them both that such children as they were could no otherwhere be found, and that let what might happen, they never must cry. To this the boy Willy gave assent, saying 'Aye;' but the baby doubted the fact, which doubt she proclaimed by a vehement scream, upon which Sukey lifted her rosy arms out of cheese curds, leaving them to drain alone, and, taking up the screaming baby, she rocked her and sang. Not a pedlar's song now; no, Sukey had forgotten all songs not worth singing, and chief of all to a baby, for she said, 'There is no telling how much they may know, for it isn't words that prove wisdom; of that I am sure.' So she rocked the baby in her comfortable arms, and as she rocked her she sang the cradle hymn, which she said she had learned on purpose to quiet the babes when nothing else would. Sukey's voice was a pleasant one, and, rocking softly, she sang; and when she had finished the baby was sleeping, and little Willie had laid down his little head on her foot, and was fast asleep too, with his arm round the neck of his little horse of wood.

Old Dolly sat up in her bed at the sound of the bells,

and, with folded hands, asked a blessing on the bridegroom and bride.

Constance was never forgetful of her aged friends; she came continually to see them, and from her old Dolly had learned all the expectations beforehand of what was to be. No one took a greater interest in the affairs of the world without than old Dolly, bed-ridden within four cottage walls. But a new world had opened on her view, and its objects, invisible to sense, but ever brightening on the vision of faith, now engaged her affections, and drew her thoughts upward. Still she retained a ready responsiveness to all that called forth fellow-feeling; and she was well content to be left in her little cottage alone, that old Nathaniel might try to get as far as the church and the park, and come back with the tidings of all things to her; so he was gone, dressed in his best, to see and be seen.

Over the shivered stem of the blasted forest-tree rang those cheerful bells; down the comfortable tall chimney of old Peggy they rang—they had to drop down with skill, for a chimney-pot on the top made the hole but a small one to let outward things in: this suited the smoke, which now rose in all weathers, and often curled in blue wreaths like the cheerful hearth's coronal. But the bells found all silent within, except the tick of a white-faced clock that hung upon the wall, and seemed to tick louder when left all alone. Two good hours before old Peggy had set out—set out from that little home, rich in comfort for age, where Maud too, grown older, was often seen sitting, having taken old Peggy for her particular friend. The old woman wore that day a short-sleeved

gown of black ground, covered over with convolvulus and other flowers of rich hue—even tulips bloomed on that old-fashioned print; and as it was made scanty, in old Peggy's style, you saw the more plainly the flowers in full view. 'Tis lovely!' old Peggy said, when any admired it; and then said no more, for she liked not talking of dress: yet she did look at the flowers sometimes when alone, and aired it the oftener, for it 'looked lovely,' she said, 'hanging up to air!' Over this, on that summer day, she wore her red winter cloak, for she said 'it was a day on which she was bound to make a procession of all the best things she had;' and above these rose the prettiest of little black bonnets—it was thought the most becoming of all Betty Cox ever made. And some said they had seen a tear drop on her work as she ran the reevers, and prinked out the silk, and edged the little bonnet with a bit of black lace for that dear old head, whose firmness had saved the precious lives that seemed appointed to death. So, locking her door safe, old Peggy was gone; and ever as she hastened along she said, 'We must be thankful!' And this one truth we may learn as we take leave of old Peggy, that the more thankful we are, the more shall we receive to be thankful for.

Jem's cottage, too, was locked; all were absent from there. Benjamin Tovel stood in a far place in the chancel, with Alice holding one hand and Willy the other. Willy had a high spirit, but the blind man said that with him he was as like a toward lamb as ever one could be in the fold! Further off stood Jem, and Patience beside him, with his baby-boy on his arm. Their pleasant faces had grown still brighter—a light that told of its birthplace, a

beam from above, rested there, for they had received Benjamin Tovel in the name of a prophet, and he had brought with him a prophet's reward.

We must not proceed to tell of all who were there; the whole village was present. Mr. Smith was there, and Mrs. Smith, in her plum-coloured silk and white crape shawl; and Rose by her side in festal array. The park was to receive all the guests; only one dear revered face was absent—Mrs. Clifford's place was vacant. Months before the village mourned for her; her passing away had been as 'a gentle wafting to immortal life,' and the mother slept by her daughter in the white tomb in the churchyard, and all the sweet work of love from or for that kindly heart was over on earth.

And who was the bridegroom? and who was the bride? The orphan Olivia that day gave her hand to the young village Rector, and the village rejoiced. Her birth, her childhood, her youth, her very sorrows, interests, friendships, and joys, had all prepared her for this—the position that above all others asks an angelic life in woman—the help meet for one whose life is consecrated to the highest service of God and of man.

Mrs. Brame stood near the bride in her brightening old age, feeble now in figure, but serene in expression. She was dressed in more attractive array than any had seen her in before. Olivia, who always had her own way with her aged friend, had been allowed to choose her attire for that day. Only once had Mrs. Brame denied her anything that she asked; that once was when Olivia had pleaded with her to come and live in the Rectory that was now to be Olivia's home. Mrs. Brame replied, 'If I left

my Lady Gertrude, it would be to die! The sight of her bears me up when I feel sinking in age. But be contented, dear child, I will often come down; and we can't do without you: you will be always stepping up here, and then you will see the old woman around whom your young life has grown.'

That evening Rose was sitting alone with her mother.

'Why say you will never leave me, child? 'Tis a giving up of your life to the comfort of your father's and mine; and it hurts me to think it may one day leave you lonesome, when all might have been different in a home of your own. You, who have been as dutiful a daughter as ever the heaven shone upon.'

'It is not duty binds me, mother; I have no will to leave you. Life away from you and father looks all strange to me. There can be no home to me like your home, my mother!'

The mother saw the smile of devoted love, and never questioned of separation again. So Rose was left in her childhood's home, and love and gladness and blessing still brightened her pathway.

But we may not linger over pictured scenes. A little while we have traced them; and those most familiar with life, in its outward aspect and its more hidden unfoldings, can best test the truth of the pictured resemblance. Holy Scripture and experience alike assure us of this one blessed fact, that 'The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day!'

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